

EVERCLEAR:  
STUDENT PERSPECTIVES ON CAMPUS SEXUAL ASSAULT

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# Abstract

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We know that campus sexual assault is a serious issue. The #MeToo movement, Baylor's scandal(s), and the Columbia University student carrying the mattress she was raped on through campus, told us that. Current studies of campus sexual assault and rape are solely quantitative or hyper-specific in their focus on a small part of the student population. This study aims to describe campus sexual assault at the University of Texas at Austin from the student perspective. Conducting semi-structured, in-depth interviews with student participants, coupled with auto-ethnographic information from a student researcher produced a peer-observational study that asked honest, well-informed questions about student life in order to understand why campus sexual assault is an epidemic and what we can do to mitigate it. Students and adult administrators are not communicating, as the rate of sexual assault is high, and the rate of reporting to UT is rock-bottom-low. This study aims to mend that divide.

We will discuss students' perspectives on party culture, how they define consent, and how these social standards influence campus sexual assault. Students' experiences of sexual assault will be analyzed, drawing connections between these stories and the environment where they took place. The aftermath of assault, including sexual health care, mental health, and trauma will be examined. We will explore what keeps the vast majority students from reporting their assault or telling anyone about it. Finally, I will give my conclusions and recommendations, outlining what all people, administrators, policymakers, students of all ages, and parents can do to affect change.

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Thank you to Not On My Campus for teaching me everything that I know about campus sexual assault and enabling me to counsel survivors, spread consent education, and empower students in order to break the cycle of sexual assault on college campuses. Special thanks to Deeds Not Words and Senator Wendy Davis for teaching me how to use my voice and these stories to become a changemaker for all Texans.

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# Content Warning

This is a content warning to readers that reading graphic stories of sexual assault can induce stress, anxiety, depression, or secondary trauma. I encourage all readers to take moments of pause or skip sections if necessary and seek mental healthcare if you feel the emotions listed above. There is a list of university resources within the interview script in Appendix A.

# Introduction

Campus sexual assault is a public health epidemic. Non-consensual sex occurs at universities nationwide with alarming frequency, as one in five women and one in 16 men are sexually assaulted during enrollment.<sup>1</sup> However, the issue is well-hidden, as American society long viewed sexual assault as too taboo to discuss. The survivors feel this stigma and judgement, as 68% of those who experience sexual assault at the University of Texas at Austin (UT Austin) did not tell anyone until the anonymous Cultivating Learning and Safe Environments (CLASE) study asked in 2015. The #MeToo movement gave survivors of sexual assault and rape a supportive outlet, leading to a watershed of victims' public announcements. In this thesis, we will learn how and why campus sexual assault is occurring and why survivors do not want to report their assault. We will gain an understanding of how this crisis is damaging our communities, education, and health. This research changes the way that we study campus sexual assault, moving from statistics of who it's happening to and where it occurs, to asking why it is happening, how student culture fosters this toxic atmosphere, and what the university is doing to neglect its students.

If campus sexual assault is a virus, a college party at the University of Texas at Austin is its ideal environment to thrive. Students, usually between 18-20 years old, getting drunk for the first time, maybe having sex for the first time. There isn't anything wrong with drinking or sex, but engaging in sex with a stranger without discussing boundaries or consent is where things go wrong. Nervous, drunken, young people, stumbling their way through their first sexual

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<sup>1</sup> Krebs, C. P., Lindquist, C., Warner, T., Fisher, B., & Martin, S. (2007). The campus sexual assault (CSA) study: Final report. Retrieved from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service: <http://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/221153.pdf>

encounters with no education on how or when to ask for their partner's permission. How could this *not* go wrong?

Imagining a college party, one would think, maybe these students have a few drinks, maybe they get drunk or use marijuana every once in a while, and maybe they meet someone new and get their number at the end of the night or go home together and make out. We would be in a much better situation if student life was that mild.

At UT Austin, the fraternity parties serve punch that is a mixture of "lemonade and Everclear," according to Molly, an undergraduate senior at UT and a subject in this study. Everclear is a strong grain alcohol. While Tito's Vodka, another Austin favorite, is an 80 out of 200 proof alcohol, Everclear ranges from 120-190 proof. Molly believes that men make the drinks stronger in order to lower partygoers' inhibitions and make them more likely to consent to sex.<sup>2</sup>

Everclear is a symbol for the campus sexual assault crisis. It is one detail in the broad network of normalized behavior and conversations between students that perpetuate campus rape culture. However, our current methods of analysis would not capture practices like making punch with Everclear. Researchers are studying campus sexual assault with quantitative data, but qualitative study is key to gaining a deeper understanding of why this problem exists. Without an understanding of why campus sexual assault is occurring, how are we supposed to end it? Students' perspectives on the issue and insight on practices influencing the culture were always *Everclear*; all we had to do was ask them.

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<sup>2</sup> In 2018, The University of Texas at Austin's Interfraternity Council (IFC) instated a rule that only third-party vendors could distribute hard liquor at fraternity events. The IFC president claims that the change occurred to reduce fraternity liability for serving hard liquor at parties. In my ethnographic studies, students suspect that the change occurred because too many rumors circulated about fraternities spiking their punch with drugs. Whether or not the punch is served, the culture persists: "UT Frats Restrict Hard Liquor." The Daily Texan. October 18, 2018. Accessed May 13, 2019. <http://www.dailytexanonline.com/2018/10/18/ut-frats-restrict-hard-liquor>.

Molly, who inspired the title of the thesis, was a subject and contributed to the study's findings. This study conducted in-depth interviews with students in order to understand their perspective and experience. During her interview, she opened up to me about her own sexual assault:

“I got really drunk freshman year... Was it freshman year? Yeah. I was like blackout (experiencing memory loss due to intoxication), and ended up having sex with someone. I didn't remember it. I was on my period and so I had a tampon in. The tampon got lodged so far up my vagina that it didn't come out for five days. I didn't know how to handle the situation because I woke up and didn't know who this person was next to me. It was terrible. I still don't know what happened. I think I was too drunk. I don't know. It was shitty... I don't know how to label that or how to think about it. I don't know...”

I was really, really upset. It didn't have any lasting damages for me. I don't trust fraternity guys for sure. I guess I didn't have sex for a while after that, but I don't feel psychologically damaged. I feel less trusting, but I hate that person with a passion, and I hate that I still see him on campus. I know who he is, and nothing ever happened to him. I think he's a shit. That's about it. That makes me mad. Every time I see him, it makes my blood curdle.”

It is confusing that Molly says that she doesn't feel lasting psychological damage, while also describing a strong emotional response to the sight of her perpetrator and the experience's long-term impact on her ability to trust others. While interviewing her, I bluntly responded, “That is a psychological response.” She replied,

“Yeah, but it only happens when I see his face, which is rare. I have a visceral reaction to it... The only people that know about it were my freshman roommates at the time... They were there. I think [roommate 1] saw me come home with him but it was just at the very beginning of freshman year, so we didn't even know each other. She didn't know if I was the type of girl that would sleep with random guys, and neither did [roommate 2]. They didn't know what to do. They just assumed that I was drunk and whatever. I don't blame them for anything, of course. I remember sitting on my bed with [roommate 1] and [roommate 2] and crying for a while. I never told my mom or my dad or my cousin or anyone else...”

I feel like [my roommates] needed to know because I had questions that I wanted them to answer about how I was when I got home, and I didn't know what to do. I didn't remember if I had [the tampon] in or not, so when [it] came out, that was when I broke down. At first, I was like okay, I had sex with this person. I didn't mean to. That's shitty. Then when I realized that I had a tampon in during



that, that it probably hurt and that I obviously probably didn't say that was okay because [I] knew I had a piece of cloth... I don't know. I figured that I just didn't have [a tampon] in, and then I did, and it freaked me out.”

Molly described herself as “blackout” during this encounter. “Blackout drunk” means to be so inebriated that there are significant, extended gaps in one’s memory, although the person is still technically awake and often mobile. Because of the significant gaps in Molly’s memory, I asked her if she thinks that she was conscious or awake during the encounter. She says,

“I think about this... I’ve thought about this recently. I remember... I have this image in my head very vaguely of him on top of me, but I don't remember much else. That's just something that has always stuck in my brain, this one-flash type thing, but I don't remember leaving the bar to get to my house. I don't remember how we got there, who called the Uber. I don't remember walking into my room or being in the elevator, any of that. I don't remember getting to my bed. I was surprised when I saw him in my bed the next morning. I did not remember that he was there when I woke up. But I do have a little vivid memory of us having sex.”

Because Molly described herself as blackout drunk during this experience, and explained that she had sex, I asked her if she thinks blackout sex is consensual sex. She replied,

“No. I don't. It's not. But maybe I did say I wanted to have sex when I was blackout. I think the problem is that we shouldn't have had sex at all if I was that drunk, but maybe I did give consent when I was really drunk, and he asked and I said yes, but I was too drunk to give meaningful consent. It's still not okay but it's not as bad as if I was unconscious. I don't know what happened. I don't know. I could've been just so blackout that I was there but not there. I could've also been dead, I don't know...I've never talked to this person again and his experience. He's never tried to reach out to me. I think he knows he fucked up. He's never once contacted me. He didn't text me afterwards. He left and I literally never spoke to him ever again. It's been radio silence. I think he knows he did something bad.”

A goal of this thesis is to understand if college students are aware that they’re assaulting each other or have too little knowledge of consent to differentiate consensual sex from assault. Seeking insight to this question, I asked Molly, “Why do you think he knows he did something bad?” Molly said,

“Because if he got pleasure from what he did, he would've texted me again and wanted to have sex again. Guys, you hook up and it's good, let's do it again. But it wasn't good, clearly. I think he feels guilty. That's why he's never spoken to me ever again.”

It seems that in Molly's case, the student went into the encounter thinking that the sex was consensual but realized during or after that something was not quite right. Whether Molly fell unconscious, was visibly too drunk, or something else signaled to him that his actions were wrong, we probably will never know. Exploring this question with Molly, I suggested that the tampon still inside of her should have been a strong signal to him that something was off, as it would be extremely difficult to penetrate a person with a large, dry piece of cotton already inside of them. With disbelief, I asked, “How did he not know there was a tampon in? How did he not...” I didn't even need to finish my sentence before Molly replied,

“Maybe he did [feel it.] I don't know. Maybe he could feel it. I don't know. It was a super [size] too, like a big tampon. It was like green and moldy and disgusting when it came out... I thought I had a vaginal disease afterwards...It was so weird. It just fell out, out of nowhere. Literally four days later, I sat down on the toilet and it just fell out. I don't know how it got down there. I'm not making this up... That's why I was so surprised. I think during that day I might have felt it. I don't know. All the sudden I just sat down, and it plopped. It was very bizarre.”

I just said, “Wow.” And Molly, with tears quietly falling down her cheeks, said, “That's my little story.”

Knowing that Molly only told her two freshman roommates before this interview, I could tell that reflecting upon her experience was upsetting. Remembering her tampon falling out caused her emotional response. I asked her, “Why do you think that part of it made you break down?” Molly told me,

“It's like what you just said, how could he not have felt it? I'm sure he did. I'm sure he knew that... It just makes it less consensual, I think, because that means I probably didn't say yeah, let's go for it, because I can feel that a tampon is getting lodged in my vagina, or at least I should if I was aware enough to know what's happening... his penis isn't going to go anywhere if there's a super tampon in

there unless you push really hard... that's going to hurt, and it probably did hurt which means I probably didn't know what was going on. That made me upset... Before, I guess it [was] more excusable.”

As a freshman in college, Molly didn't have the consent education necessary to know that her experience was rape. All around her, students were having drunk or “blackout” sex. This environment makes it difficult for students to differentiate what is normal and what is sexual assault. If we believe that people cannot give consent when they are too inebriated to make decisions or remember the encounter, then blackout sex is rape, and students are being raped every weekend. In this study, some students predicted that the rate of sexual assault at UT Austin could be as high as 50-75% of students. With the knowledge Molly accumulated from productive conversations about consent with student activists throughout college, she looks back on her experience as a freshman and realizes that conscious, meaningful consent was not present.

After the tampon fell out, Molly was concerned that she had a vaginal infection and wanted to see a doctor at University Health Services (UHS). But she didn't end up making an appointment. Here's why:

“I remember when it happened, when the tampon fell out, I panicked. That was the conversation with me, [roommate 1] and [roommate 2], when I was like, ‘What do I do?’ Then I remember sitting at my computer with them on my bed and I'm filling out the form for UHS, and there's an option where you're like, ‘is this a sexual assault, rape problem or is this a women's health problem?’ I had to categorize it, and that was actually the moment when I was really freaked out because I didn't know how to answer that question. That's why I didn't end up going through with [the appointment] because I knew that it was probably the sexual assault one, but I just wanted to get my vagina checked out and I didn't want to have to tell her the story of why it was up there for so long, so I didn't end up going to see anyone because I felt uncomfortable about checking that option and I just never did it... I just didn't want to...”

I was still figuring out how I felt about it. I still don't really know how to categorize it as what exactly it was. I don't have any memory of it. I don't know what I said or what I did in the moment and I just felt uncomfortable saying I had been sexually assaulted or I had been raped. That was just an idea I didn't want to reconcile with at the time. I was like I'd rather just figure out if my vagina is okay

right now...Then I just didn't want to have to explain it and be upset. I don't know.

I really hated the idea of me being sexually assaulted and I just didn't want to check that box. I really didn't want to check that box, so I didn't, and I didn't go.”

In Molly’s case, the threat of a university doctor identifying her as a sexual assault survivor and reporting her to the Title IX office, who handles these cases, and her fear of facing the institution, was enough to dissuade her from seeking healthcare. The stigma of sexual assault and the fracture in communication between young people, adults, and administrators is debilitating our capacity to prevent this crisis. In addition, we must analyze students’ reluctance to self-identify as sexual assault survivors and understand if this reluctance comes from a lack of consent education or a deeper issue of identity destabilization. This thesis is meant to be a catalyst for conversations between students, adults, university administrators, and policymakers, in order to build the bridges key to effective change. The central questions of this study are, why is campus sexual assault occurring? How does it manifest? And, what can we do to stop it?

## METHODOLOGY

Current studies of campus sexual assault are conducted by adult researchers and focus on a quantitative perspective. We know who is experiencing sexual assault at the highest frequency and where it is occurring, but we don’t understand why: why does student culture allow sexual assault fester, what are students doing that makes sexual assault imminent, and most importantly, what can we do to end this epidemic.

This study asks why. The statistics on campus sexual assault are startling. The University of Texas Board of Regents supported the CLASE study in 2015, which received 7,684 responses. The CLASE study found that 15% of undergraduate women are raped during enrollment. This number is likely an underestimate as well, because rape and sexual assault are the most

underreported crimes, point blank.<sup>3</sup> In the CLASE study, students were asked if they experienced sexual assault, and if they answered yes, they were asked who they told about the assault. Only 6% of student survivors reported their assault to the university and only 3% reported to the police.<sup>4</sup> In addition to students' aversion to reporting, as we will explore further when we discuss reporting and justice, sexual assault survivors are often unable to label their experience as assault due to societal views of what rape looks like or a personal desire to avoid the labels 'victim' or 'rape survivor.'

This research is about the survivors who the university does not know exist. This thesis will explore how students perceive the campus sexual assault crisis, how student behavior is contributing to it, and what students need from university administrators and policymakers. Since we are operating in an environment where facilitating students to even report assault is seriously challenging, I believe that this information is only attainable from student to student conversations. The university does not know how to ask the key questions, because their understanding of student life, party culture, and sexual behavior is so limited. A fellow student who attends these parties, was active in sorority or fraternity life, and engages in authentic conversations about sex, relationships, drinking, and drugs with students can formulate questions that get at the root of the issue and solicit honest answers. This study is auto-ethnographic, as details came both from student subjects and my own student experience. For example,

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<sup>3</sup> "Get Statistics." National Sexual Violence Resource Center. Accessed May 12, 2019. <https://www.nsvrc.org/statistics>.

<sup>4</sup> Noël Busch-Armendariz, et. al. "Cultivating learning and safe environments: An empirical study of prevalence and perceptions of sexual harassment, stalking, dating/domestic abuse and violence, and unwanted sexual contact – The University of Texas at Austin," *Institute on Domestic Violence & Sexual Assault*. The University of Texas at Austin, 2017, <https://utexas.app.box.com/v/utaustinclasesurveyreport>. (accessed December 11, 2018).

descriptions of social organizations' hierarchy aren't from subjects' data, it's information that I collected as a sorority member.

All subjects are represented by pseudonyms and all identifying information is removed from this study. All student groups, sororities, and fraternities also have pseudonyms. The purpose of this study is not to accuse or slander any group or institution; this thesis is meant to spark change in our communities that can build fruitful recommendations, conversations, and policies that will keep students safe and healthy. The University of Texas at Austin is merely one example of the same issue and culture rattling colleges nationwide. The purpose of this study is not to point fingers, it is to communicate and understand a perspective that has been hidden for too long.

The University of Texas at Austin does not know how toxic the culture is and likely doesn't want to find out. If they knew, they would have to publicize this crisis in order to avoid being accused of a cover-up. Administrators are inhibited from making change, because drawing too much attention to the issue risks a PR scandal; no parent wants to send their child to the school where students are raped. The goal of this study is to bridge communication between two groups of concerned human beings who have trouble understanding each other due to cultural and generational gaps.

Fourteen participants were enrolled in the study and participated in a semi-structured in-depth interview ranging between an hour to a half to three hours. The subjects self-selected into the study after being approached by me in order to ensure a trusted relationship between their interviewer and the interviewee. The highest priority was given to creating a situation where participants were comfortable sharing intimate stories. A participant-observational model, in which the researcher is also a member of the community, is key to accessing the stories of

students who do not trust adults or the university administration enough to discuss their experiences with them. I am a student at UT-Austin who engaged in the same culture as the participants. I listened to and participated in conversations about drinking and party culture with these subjects as a friend, before the project began. As a student activist working to prevent sexual assault in college, many subjects previously came to me seeking guidance or help to deal with their experience of sexual assault, so I knew they could trust me.

The subjects were a cross section of the UT Austin undergraduate population. When deciding who to ask to be a subject, I recruited a group of students that represented a broad range of demographics and experiences on campus. I focused on religious identity, race, sexual orientation, and gender identity in order to capture a diverse sample population. In order to document multiple perspectives on the issue, I looked for subjects that experienced different aspects of the sexual assault epidemic. This included student activists, survivors, and perpetrators. Many subjects fell into more than one of these roles. Because this study sought reasons why campus sexual assault is occurring, it is important to explore the reasons in multiple social environments, in order to compare and contrast communities. Rather than seeking to generalize to the entire student population, as we might in a well-designed quantitative study, the goal is to explore and engage with a range of individual experiences.

The interview covered a range of topics that seek to document campus sexual assault chronologically. The topics covered in the interview include:

- Participant demographic information
- Student perception of the issue
- Campus culture
- Bystander intervention
- Consent
- Consent, alcohol and other mind-altering drugs
- Supporting students
- Student conversations

- Details of how sex is described on campus
  - Language used
  - Impact of that language
  - Conversations with potential partners
- Student experiences: survivors
  - Impact on life
  - Knowing survivors
  - Survivor experiences
- Student experiences: lack of consent and accused students
- Sexual preference
- Gender identity
- Punishment and justice
- Reporting

Beginning with the student's perspective on the issue and experience of campus life, I documented student culture in order to analyze behavior, language, and actions that may contribute to unsafe and unhealthy sexual practices on campus. I asked some subjects about bystander intervention and quickly realized that students weren't recognizing unsafe behavior and choosing not to act, but they were unable to recognize unsafe behavior and therefore did not intervene. Questions included how students define consent, how they found that definition, how and when they ask for consent in sexual encounters, and the relationship between consent and substance use. I asked survivors of sexual assault and students accused of sexual assault about their experiences, their use of on and off campus resources, and if or how trauma affected their lives. Finally, all subjects discussed reporting, justice, and punishment. The semi-structured interview acted as roadmap of topics to cover but allowed the interview to flow where the participants led it, opening avenues that I previously may not have considered. You can find the interview questions in Appendix A.

I conducted each interview at a location of the subjects' preference, sometimes occurring at an outdoor space on campus, in a private room in the library, over the phone, or if the subject requested, in their apartment building. All subjects consented to audio recording their interviews,



and I used a Dictaphone with USB compatibility to record the interviews and upload them to a computer. I sent the audio tapes to UT Libraries for internal transcription and received the written transcripts in a Microsoft Word document. I uploaded these transcripts to Dedoose, an online qualitative research analysis program. After reviewing topics and themes that subjects discussed, I developed an analytic coding guide, a list of common themes that could be used to tag excerpts from the interview with the subject of the quote. For example, if someone was discussing their definition of consent, I took an excerpt of those sentences and added the tag “defining consent.” I used my codes to compile data by theme. So, when I discuss the findings regarding students’ definition of consent, I could immediately compile all of the subjects’ quotes about this topic, analyze them, and discuss their perspectives, including both finding common agreement among subjects for each theme, and noting which subjects did not agree with the common theme and why. My coding guide can be found in Appendix B.

## CHARACTERS

Six of the 14 subjects are introduced in this thesis. These six people, Molly, Simran, Will, Alex, Ben, and Vanessa, are representative of the larger pool of subjects. They articulate each of the parts of this story, communicate their ideas eloquently, and represent conflicting perspectives. Since this is a thesis, and not a book, introducing too many subjects would make the text confusing, whereas introducing only six allows you to become familiar with these characters. Let’s meet them:

Molly is a senior at UT Austin and an articulate, sharp, honors student. She is an excellent writer, a strategic thinker, and most importantly, a kindhearted and introspective person. Molly is one of my closest friends and she is deeply analytical, be it boys, friends, school, society, politics, you name it. A sorority member at UT, she’s really enjoyed her

experience and the friends that she's made but is also able to think critically about the relationship between sororities and fraternities. She grew up in Catholic schools, and regarding her religion, she says, "I would say raised Christian but now I'd say agnostic." Although she shares her experience of sexual assault in this thesis, as one of her best friends, I didn't know about her story until her interview. She is a white, heterosexual, cis-gendered, white woman. Cis-gendered means to identify with one's sex at birth.

Simran is a South Asian woman and a senior. She is a student activist at UT Austin working to educate students about consent and counsel students who experience sexual assault but do not know how to navigate the university reporting system or do not want to report, which is the vast majority of them. As a successful honors student and experienced spokesperson for this cause, it is difficult to imagine a time when Simran was caught up in abusive relationship, because she has blossomed into such a strong woman. In her relationship, her partner refused to use condoms per her request, and because Simran's oral contraceptives did not work due to gastrointestinal complications, she became pregnant twice and terminated both pregnancies. She represents students of color and immigrant students at UT, and her perspectives on students' sexual behavior are unique because of her background. She is cis-gendered and heterosexual, and practices Hinduism.

Will illustrates this culture for us from the eyes of a straight, white fraternity member at UT-Austin. He is cis-gendered, heterosexual, and a Christian. Will is an introspective personality who is able to reflect upon the practices and dialogue in his own social circles that may contribute to a culture of sexual assault. He spent time in school working with a sexual assault prevention organization. Will is also an honors student and seems to have one foot in an a highly exclusive, socially intense, popular fraternity, and another in the academic world as a successful

student and intelligent mind that can probably do laps around his fraternity brothers. His perspective was integral to this study in order to illustrate an insider's view of party and hookup culture at UT in an honest and articulate way.

Alex has a wicked sense of humor and a huge heart. He always sets out to put a smile on everyone's face. He was a good friend of mine my freshman year and went our separate ways as he dived deeper into his fraternity's social circle. He is white, cis-gendered, heterosexual, and agnostic. Alex never fails to make me laugh and always greets me with a big hug. However, I worry that he gets caught up in what society and his friends expect of him as he seems to mold himself to his environment's social norms rather than blazing his own trail. This becomes especially apparent to me when he partakes in the dangerous drug and drinking habits of his fraternity brothers or makes overly sexual comments to women, probably in an effort to flirt with them. He is a great example of a sweet person who became victim to UT students' culture.

Ben is a Jewish, cis-gendered man and a senior. He is also a fraternity member at UT. Ben is a nice kid, someone that I ran in circles with my freshman year. He is a hard-working science student at UT. Like Alex, Ben became swept up in fraternity and student culture. With the pressure to be sexually active weighing on him, he drunkenly had sex with a younger student without asking for her consent. He admits that he raped her and is working hard to understand the intricacies of consent, so he doesn't hurt anyone else.

Finally, Vanessa is a junior student and a Jewish, cis-gendered woman. She is a sorority member and a prominent sexual assault activist at UT and in the local community. She juggles a lot, as an honors student in a demanding major, who makes time to keep up her buzzing social life, as she is friendly and popular with more friends than she can count, while trying to educate the whole university about safe sex and consent. This cause is important to her as she was raped

on her first night of college. Despite how difficult the experience was, Vanessa picked herself up and kept on hustling with her bright personality, eternal optimism, and fabulous smile, always giving 110%.

Each of these characters are my good friends and I am deeply honored that they trust me to share their stories. I am thankful for their honesty and being so open with their experiences.

# Chapter 1: Party Culture

Students using alcohol and drugs for the first time and having sex for the first time, combined with a lack of consent education and a heavy social pressure to be sexually active, makes the presence of a sexual assault epidemic unsurprising. In this chapter we will explore the social, party, and hookup culture at The University of Texas at Austin that forms an environment for unhealthy and unsafe sexual practices to fester.

## TO GO DRINKING, GO BINGE DRINKING, GET DRUNK

What substances are students using, how much, how often, and how is this contributing to campus sexual assault? This section describes students' drinking and drug habits in order to contextualize the student environment. All students in the sample describe observing or participating in drinking culture at UT. However, while some students think that these habits are excessive or dangerous, some think that it is normal.

Simran observes the pressure students feel to drink and party through her younger sister, who is a freshman at UT,

“There's a lot of pressure to go out and drink. I know my sister doesn't drink or go out as much, and she struggled to find friends because she would only go out once in a while, that's not her thing. But there's such a pressure to go out, to go to frat parties, to go drinking, go binge drinking, get drunk.”

Like many colleges and large, American state schools, drinking and partying is considered a part of the college experience. This culture is especially intense in Greek life, or sororities and fraternities, and social organizations, like Spirit Groups, because the main purpose of these organizations is to facilitate new friendships and social experiences. When referring to Greek life, this term is specific to chapters that are in the Interfraternity Council and University Panhellenic Council. These groups participate in the formal recruitment process, while multicultural or academic chapters have a separate recruitment process for eligible members.

Those who view the culture from the outside, like Simran, see it differently than those on the inside, like Will.

Will tells us about the drinking and drug culture he shares with his friends. His tone implies that drinking to get drunk is normal among students, especially at events like bar tabs, where fraternities pre-pay for a tab at a bar on Sixth Street, downtown to encourage people to attend the event. A fraternity pays for a \$2,000 tab, and those who show up, fraternity members or not, can get their drinks on the fraternity's dime until those 2,000 dollars are spent. When describing his and his friends' drinking habits, all of whom are seniors in college over the age of 21, he says,

“We drink casually. Last night we played blackjack and drank. We also drink to get drunk, whether that's for date events, or ... We have a bar tab tonight. We'll probably be drinking to get drunk then. I have plenty of friends that use drugs recreationally... weed, and Xanax, cocaine. Yeah. I have plenty of friends that do all of that.”

Will's description of student drinking culture shows that although students sometimes have a beer or two casually with their friends, they also sometimes binge drink with the aim of getting drunk. This binge drinking mostly takes place before parties, date events, or bar tabs. In addition, students have easy access to a wide variety of drugs and use such substances at times when it is appropriate to binge drink. Students are often mixing drugs like marijuana, Xanax, and cocaine with alcohol. A number of adults advising this research found student cocaine use surprising, and expected that students would be using other drugs, like marijuana or even psychedelic mushrooms more often. However, among wealthy fraternity and sorority members whose families are able to spend between \$4,000-6,000 per year in membership dues, cocaine's high price tag is a non-issue. It is a popular drug choice for this population. In my personal experience, I saw students snort lines of cocaine off of bathroom sinks during fraternity parties.

Overall, students both inside and outside of Greek life believe that the alcohol and drug use among students is risky. Some subjects did not make note of dangers associated with these activities and thought of them as normal.

## THEY BECOME EASY TARGETS

Several subjects quickly made a connection between intoxication and sexual assault. In fact, they believe that heavy drinking and drug use at parties is directly linked to it. Like most universities, Greek life at UT-Austin consists of all-male fraternities and all-female sororities. Only the fraternities are allowed to serve alcohol, throw parties, or host the opposite sex. Few sororities on campus even allow men into the living quarters of their chapter houses. Those that do allow men often impose restrictions on male visiting time. For example, men are allowed to study in the kitchen or sitting room with house members at any time but are only allowed in the section of the house with bedrooms between the hours of 12-5pm. Sorority members are not allowed to store or drink alcohol inside of the house. Fraternities are allowed to serve, drink, and store alcohol, throw parties, and have girls over whenever they want.

These rules create a power dynamic. If sorority women want to party, especially if they are under 21 years old, their best bet is a fraternity party. The fraternity members provide free alcohol, music, and a venue. Female subjects jumped at the chance to discuss the power imbalance between men and women in UT Greek life and how it contributes to sexual assault.

Vanessa is a Junior at UT-Austin and describes why this culture gives fraternity men a sense of power over their female guests:

“I think that guys putting on the events where the drinking, and the music, and all the fun stuff happens gives them a sense of power over girls because I've seen it with girls in line at [fraternity] parties where the guys walked by so cocky and proud of the fact that girls are waiting hours to get into their party, so they feel so entitled and so cool. I think that gives them a dominating feeling over women, which can perpetuate assault.”

When sorority members are waiting in line to enter a party, the fraternity members often walk by to see how many women are in line or lean out of their upstairs windows to see women clamoring to enter below. Vanessa tells us that this environment makes the men feel superior and such a feeling can melt into the night's activities.

In addition, Molly, who we met in the introduction, strongly believes that the drinking culture is purposeful. She believes that the drinks are made stronger in order to make women more vulnerable targets. Molly says,

“I also think the reason why the punch is so strong is so that girls will get too drunk, and not be able to consent. I really think that is intentional... Guys like, thrive when girls are getting drunk at their parties, because they think that they become easy targets. Because they think girls become more willing when they're drunk, and well I guess that's it. They think that girls become more willing to have sex with them when they're drunk, therefore, they should take advantage of them. That's what they think.”

When the punch is made with “lemonade and Everclear” one must ask, why are these kids trying to get *so* drunk? What is the point? And to Molly, the point is easy sex.

The problem here isn't necessarily the drinking, it's what happens after the drinking. These students are often far past the capacity to give meaningful consent to a sexual partner. They often aim to become what we call “blackout” drunk, which describes altered cognition and consciousness to the point of significant memory loss, stumbling, slurred speech, and even a glazed-over, ‘lights on, no one's home’ look in one's eyes. Even in this state, students often still have sex, because nobody told them that consent gets complicated when you're inebriated and your brain isn't working normally.

## THE QB SNEAK

The QB Sneak is a football play. It describes the quarterback sneaking the ball in play through the line of scrimmage. It is also a term that students use to describe drugging their



friends' drinks without their consent as a prank or joke. Alex, a senior fraternity member, tells me that he hears about a QB Sneak an average of once a weekend, as frequency increases if there is a big party. He described QB sneaking to me:

“QB sneak is a play in football, and then a QB sneak in this context is QB, a quarter bar (Xanax), or quarter Xanax, and then you sneak it in someone's drink, and so then a queeb is a quarter bar, a heeb is a half bar, then a feeb is a full bar, so it's like feeb sneak, heeb sneak, queeb, but you call queeb a QB sneak.”

This practice is common among students, and three subjects had information on the topic in their interviews. No one denied the practice, but all of them questioned the link between this practice and non-consensually drugging a potential sexual partner.

I asked Will if he knew about QB sneaking and if his friends engaged in the practice. He says, “QB sneaking. People do it not just with Xanax but people do it with ED meds. What's it called, Viagra? It's so twisted, oh my god.” Will seemed a bit shocked by his friends' behavior once he said it out loud, but the practice is normalized amongst college men that it seems to defer such self-reflection. When I asked Will how often his group of friends QB sneaks, he said, “Very infrequently. At least in my friend group. I know of one Viagra instance and two specific instances of bars... I've never had it happen to me. I've never done that to anyone.”

Although this prank is dangerous, as mixing Xanax or “bars” and alcohol can put the recipient in the unfortunate position of being too inebriated to function in downtown Austin, I was curious to see if Will and his friends felt the same way. Will says that

“People definitely think it's funny.... The ED stuff is funny, but there's also some problems with that, obviously. Some of the same problems as the Xanax one. But yeah, people think they're both funny.”

Although potential safety and health issues are recognized, the practice continues.

Rumors circulate that nonconsensual drug use is used not only amongst buddies as a fun prank, but also in order to take advantage of potential sexual partners. Another subject described

a prominent fraternity drugging her entire sorority pledge class at a “mixer,” or party between the freshmen of one sorority and one fraternity. She claims that over half of her pledge class was sexually assaulted that night. I asked Will if he thinks that non-consensually drugging one’s friends could normalize such a practice. He believes that there is a “connection” between the two, but thinks,

“It’s a stretch to draw between doing that to your friends and doing that to a girl for the intent of having sex with them. I actually think that’s a stretch to make. I don’t know any instances of people actually drugging girls. I have no specific knowledge of something like that happening. I can’t really comment on a link between those two things. There is definitely a process of normalizing giving someone drugs and them not knowing it. Obviously. If you’re pranking people and people think it’s funny, then you’re going to do it again. Of course, within your friend group that becomes normalized. Again, I don’t know of any specific times of people ... I don’t know who drugs girls. I don’t have any specific knowledge of that.”

I prodded him further, using the story above from the subject, claiming that we know from previous interviews that drugging women in order to take advantage of them does occur on campus. He responded, “It definitely happens. Right. But I don’t know of anyone that I know who has done that with someone... Right, right. Yeah. I do think that there is a normalizing of putting drugs into someone’s drink and them not knowing it.” So, Will knows that non-consensually drugging people with the intent to sexually engage with them once they are intoxicated does happen on college campuses. However, his opinion on whether the two are related was still unclear, as he seemed to agree that there was a connection, but then backtracked and claimed that one causing the other would be a stretch. I offered that maybe if the QB sneak wasn’t happening then it doesn’t mean that drugging girls wouldn’t be happening, to which he agreed. I then suggested that maybe non-consensually drugging others with the intent to sexually engage with them is increased because of the QB sneak, to which he replied, “I would also make the hypothesis that that’s true. But I have no data points to be able to say.”

Although Will and I could not conclude whether the QB sneak contributes to campus sexual assault, we can agree that it is a practice that endangers students health and wellbeing. The mixture of Xanax and alcohol often makes students severely intoxicated, causing major memory loss and the inability to walk properly or speak clearly. Mixing these substances can lead to confusion, uncoordinated body movements, drowsiness, and a depressed respiratory rate, because the systemic effects of two depressants are administered at once are greater than what students might predict. If a student is pranked and subsequently left behind by his or her drunk friends in downtown Austin, the student could be in a dangerous situation as they could be alone and unable to advocate for themselves or find their way home. Administering such drugs, especially erectile dysfunction medications, puts the student at a medical risk, as they may have an underlying heart or blood pressure condition that causes an adverse reaction to Viagra. Students could also be allergic to the drug administered. Regardless of the safety consequences, it is unethical to administer medication without the recipient or their decision maker's consent and doing so without a license to practice as a healthcare provider is illegal. If we agree that people should have the right to decide what goes inside their body, whether its medication, or another person's body part in the case of sexual assault, then this practice is deeply unethical, troubling, and unlawful.

### HOOKUP CULTURE IS VERY REAL

College students have sex, that's obvious. However, the ways in which students approach sex and think about sex are changing over time. While one who went to school in the mid-twentieth century might be more conservative about sex and not engage in intercourse before marriage, students today are enthralled in a 'hook up culture.' Sex can be casual, non-committal,

absent of romance or genuine attraction, a quick one-night-stand, and not indicate any interest in any sort of formal relationship. This kind of interaction is common at UT-Austin.

‘Hook up’ is a complicated term used in a variety of instances. It usually means more than just kissing someone, which would be considered ‘making out.’ In this thesis hooking up can encompass anything on the spectrum of sexual engagement that is more intense than kissing. It can include digital penetration, oral sex, vaginal intercourse, or anal intercourse. It oftentimes refers to intercourse. But if gossiping with a friend about a sexual experience the night before, and you tell the friend, ‘we hooked up,’ a close friend would press further and ask if you had sex, referring to vaginal or anal intercourse. However, the intimate details of how far an encounter went are oftentimes private and only shared with close friends. If you’re telling an acquaintance ‘I hooked up with him’ it is meant to be a blanket term that expresses you had some form of sexual engagement with the person, but the acquaintance does not need to know the details.

Multiple students indicated that they believe causal sex and hookup culture may contribute to sexual assault. They also believe that sexual assault and rape still existed at high rates at a time before hookup culture. Hookup culture created a new means for sexual assault to occur but did not necessarily impact the rates. Vanessa, who told us about the power-high that fraternity men get when girls line up for their parties, says,

“I think that in Greek life, hookup culture is very real, and people love to make games out of sexual conquest. I know that a lot of people go out with the attitude of getting laid with whoever comes across them at the moment. I think that having sex be the goal would definitely cause people to cross the line [of] consent because their [goal] is sex and anything else, so they’ll take any kind of path to get there.”

When students go into the night assuming that everyone that they encounter is also looking for sex, why would they feel a need to have a conversation about consent? Students in a hookup culture are often assuming their partners’ consent through their presence in and engagement with

the hookup culture. For example, students sometimes consider someone walking back to their apartment with them after a party to be consent. I also discussed hookup culture in depth with Molly. She finds hookup culture distasteful and thinks that it leads students to disrespect their sexual partners, especially women. She says,

“That's a totally normal thing to do these days, is just to have sex with them and be like, not having you again. Which is a really, anxiety-inducing culture to live in, that you can't trust people that you're doing incredibly intimate things with, and that's normal. That's wild.”

I expanded on her opinion, in agreement, adding, “and the person who's left with that is always the girl in the scenario, it is very rarely the guy.” She replied, “I agree.”

When a person and their partner have little to no relationship, there is no incentive to treat the person with dignity and respect. Because you likely will never see the partner again, they become like a one-night sex object. Molly detailed an experience with her first and last one-night stand. She felt that her partner's behavior was degrading. He in no way wanted to learn about Molly's sexual desires and preferences. Instead, she was a conduit for his pleasure. She describes how he continually asked her for anal sex, and she told him ‘no’ over and over again. He continued to prod her, asking, ‘what about just a finger?’ and ‘what about just for a second?’ with no regard for Molly's consistent rejection. Eventually, Molly got up, put her clothes on in the bathroom, and left. Molly is lucky in this instance, because many subjects did not have the experience of their partner asking for their consent. For the subjects that are survivors, their partners went ahead and engaged in the activity without asking. Oftentimes, these subjects were too intoxicated to respond. Molly explained how meaningless or casual sex could lead to sexual assault:

"Not necessarily that they're seeking [to] sexual assault people it's like this larger issue of not committing to or respecting the woman that they're hooking up with and that just leads to miscommunication in the bedroom.”

Molly believes that when young men expect to “get laid” it can lead to sexual assault. Looking for a more specific cause and effect, I asked her why. Without skipping a beat, she said,

“Because they’re assuming [that] they’re going to get laid, and they’re assuming that the girls entering their party are willing... I think that's a huge part of it. They assume that if you're drinking and making out with them on the dance floor, or wearing X outfit-that's extreme I've never actually heard a guy say, ‘Well she's wearing a tight skirt, she wants to get laid’, but— I think guys think that the girls that enter their parties are down [willing]. [Women] have something, a debt to pay, to them, which helps [men] to get laid.”

College students are interpreting a willingness to engage in party culture as implicit consent. In addition, in Greek life specifically, there is a power play working in the background. Party guests feel that they owe their hosts in return for their hospitality. Nowhere is this pattern more apparent than at OU Weekend.

## Chapter 2: Student Life

### TX VS. OU

No, this section is not about the Texas vs. Oklahoma rivalry, but it *is* about the annual football game. The TX vs. OU game, also dubbed “OU” by students, is a microcosm of the party and hookup culture that puts intense pressure on students to have sex. For students in Greek Life and Spirit Groups, social organizations structured similarly to sororities and fraternities without the Greek letters, this is considered one of the biggest social events of the year.

Fraternity members invite dates to the event and take buses up to Dallas for the game with their chapters. The fraternity and their dates stay in a hotel the Friday night before the game and the Saturday night after. On Friday night, the fraternity throws a party at a bar or restaurant with dinner and unlimited drinks on the fraternity’s dime. The fraternity member purchases the high-demand ticket for the TX/OU game, usually costing upwards of \$100 each. He also pays for his date’s stay in the hotel, bus ride to Dallas, and his membership dues contribute to her dinner and drinks at the party on Friday night. The fraternity member and his date are assigned to the same double-bedded room with one of the member’s buddies and his date.

The anxiety-inducing task of finding a date sets in weeks before the event begins. In my own experience and that of subjects, many men are only seeking dates who will have sex with them. When a girl asks a guy if any of his friends will take her to OU Weekend, she is often met with the question, “well, would you hook up with him?” Even if a woman is not asked this question, such an expectation permeates the sexual and social culture at UT. It is evidence of the pressure put on students to have sex, even with people who they do not know well nor are interested in sexually or romantically. If you don’t engage in this practice, you usually don’t get to go to OU Weekend.

As a first-year sorority member, I was taught to believe that this tradition was normal, attendance was key to maintaining social standing. My own mother, as a former UT-Austin sorority member, strongly encouraged me to attend. Most sorority and fraternity members look forward to OU Weekend and regard it as one of the most fun and important events of the year.

However, with personal reflection, the tradition struck the subjects and me as a practice that puts women in a position of servitude and creates a high risk for sexual assault. Subjects who discussed OU described how dangerous the tradition is, and why. They told me in detail about feelings of discomfort and commentary from friends that reflected a quid-pro-quo attitude.

Will describes fraternity members' belief that their dates 'owe them something' at OU Weekend. When I asked him about this dynamic, he stated,

"I don't think I put that pressure on anyone and I don't have that expectation. But there are absolutely some people that have that expectation that I'm doing this for you, and I expect something in return. That's definitely a piece of it. OU is an extreme example of that. You're buying a hotel room; you're paying \$1,200 for this weekend. You probably want to have sex and you're hoping that that might [happen.]"

Will's opinion is just one example of the transactional nature of OU Weekend. Molly, who described hook up culture for us, is in a sorority at UT and provided a perspective from the receiving end of this interaction, confirming that women feel that they owe their dates sex,

"Let's assume that you are a freshman, this is your first year at UT, and you just joined a sorority. You get invited to OU by a boy. It could be, and actually, usually is a boy you don't know considering you've only been in this school from August to October. Or you get set up on a random date. The guy asks you and now you're required to buy him a cooler of drinks and, what else do you have to buy him? I guess you have to decorate his cooler. Then, in return, you get to stay with him, in a hotel room, with him, and one of his other buddies, and another girl, for two nights. In exchange, you get a free ticket to the game that he pays for. It's like, you don't know this person, and now you're staying in the same bed with him for two nights. He has paid for the \$200 game ticket, for you, you are going to feel like you have something to return to him."



On both sides of the story, subjects felt that women were expected to engage sexually with their dates in return for the weekend of fun. The situation invokes feelings of sexual servitude and coercion. Students in these situations sometimes have sex with their date because they are “supposed to,” not because they want sex. If we reflect upon the heavy drug and alcohol use among students, combined with the implied consent students assume their partner gives when they attend a party, then a situation like OU can be seen as an ideal environment for sexual assault to fester.

### SHE DIDN'T EVEN COME BACK... AFTER ALL THAT

Men's assumption that their spending deserves repayment in sexual activity extends beyond OU weekend. I asked Will if this expectation exists generally, and OU is merely an extreme example, to which he responded, “I think OU is an extreme example of that being on guys' minds. Yeah.” Will describes for us how this expectation that spending money on a date or performing acts of service, like carrying her purse, means that he deserves sex in return. One of his friends took his current girlfriend to a fraternity “date event” or party that women attend as the member's date. Similar to OU, the member invites a date to attend the party and oftentimes pays for her dinner and drinks. If the fraternity is generally considered popular, which is also described as having a high “rank”, being a “top house,” or in the “Big Five,” which is a group of the top five, most prestigious fraternities on campus, then an invitation to the date event is highly coveted and for the date, carries with it some social capital. Sororities also hold date events throughout the year.

Will tells us about a conversation he had with a friend who took Will's current girlfriend to a date event. His friend was surprised and disappointed that after buying her drinks and

performing acts of service, like retrieving her confiscated fake ID, she did not engage with him sexually. Will says,

“I am dating someone right now, and one of my friends had taken her to a date event. He was telling me what had happened on their date event. They [went] out and he paid for the whole meal, and drinks, the entire night and whatnot. He had also done things that I would classify as acts of service. Something like she had forgotten her purse and then he went back to the bar and got it while she was waiting on a cab ... [Her fake ID was taken by a bouncer] and he [went] back to the bouncer and paid him 20 bucks to get the ID back. He had not only paid for her drinks all night, [but also] her dinner, he found her lost purse, and he had retrieved her fake ID from the bouncer. The end of that story was ... Then she didn't even come back... after all of that.”

Although it may be frustrating that men feel they deserve sex because they paid for a woman's drink, or simply performed as any friend or kind citizen would, we must dig deeper and reflect upon why men feel this way in order to address and heal the culture. Will insists that his friend is a nice guy, claiming, “Okay, number one, this is a really nice dude. He's one of my best friends. He doesn't even realize that's a problem, [that there's] an expectation that is tacked on to the end of that story.” He further describes the prevalence of this expectation when he says, “There's definitely, definitely an aspect of that in guys' minds.” Will also wonders if this expectation is exclusive to fraternity and sorority date events. He proposes that men do not feel such an expectation on a date with a girl whom they have interest in as a romantic partner. Will describes an instance in which a man takes a woman on an “actual” date rather than to a date event,

“I'm imagining a situation where a guy takes a girl on an actual date. He pays for her dinner and they go out and he buys her drinks. Then, because they're on an actual date, he walks her home to her door and they don't hook up, because it's an actual date it's not a date event. I think it's really fascinating that in that situation he doesn't expect it.”

He is careful to qualify his opinion by stating, “there are definitely some guys that do [expect to hook up], but I think there's also some guys that don't because it's a first date.” I asked Will why

an actual date differs from a date event, and why that makes a difference in whether or not men expect sex afterwards. He says,

“If you ask a random girl to a date event, that's basically a first date, and now you're in a situation where maybe you are expecting it more because... everyone's doing it, so a lot of people are having sex after date events or hooking up or whatnot... Date events don't indicate interest for the future always... If you ask them on an actual date, you're probably thinking about, I might actually like this person. But we're in a culture where if you ask a random person to a date event, you might just find them attractive but not think it as a future potential.”

The date event is regarded as a more casual interaction between two students, compared to a one-on-one date. The date event is a scheduled party, organized by the fraternity, sorority, or spirit group, to which all members are expected to bring a date. Members often bring friends, people they barely know in a social organization of similar rank, are set up with a blind date by a friend, ask a crush that they have not gone on a first date with yet, and of course, but with less frequency, boyfriends, girlfriends, other exclusive partners, or someone that the member has taken on an “actual” date.

The casual nature of the date event makes the possible sexual interaction afterwards casual as well. Oftentimes, such hook ups, or instances of casual sexual activity, are one-time affairs between students drunk from the event. This creates a situation in which students under the influence who do not have a previous sexual relationship are attempting to engage in sexual activity without previous consent education or knowledge about how to approach consent while using substances. This often leads to students who are too intoxicated to give consent waking up the next morning believing that their date took advantage of them. Because the date and the sex afterwards are regarded as casual, there is oftentimes not a conversation between partners beforehand about sexual expectations or preferences. The expectation that your date will hook up with you after the event is, as we have previously discussed, *assumed*. Therefore, partners do not

ask each other for consent. In fact, most students were never taught that they should ask for consent in such instances. We will discuss this further in the section on consent education.

### YOU'VE NEVER HAD SEX BEFORE?

A logical next question is, why do these students feel the need to hook up after their date events? While alcohol consumption may lower sexual inhibition, there is an artificial pressure to have sex imposed on students at UT-Austin. We will explore why that pressure contributes to a culture of campus sexual assault.

All subjects noted social pressures to have sex, be knowledgeable about sex, and talk about sex with their friends. Sexual activity seems to be a type of social currency. If you have many sexual partners, especially if you are a man, you are perceived as more popular and therefore have more social capital than someone who does not. Students even coined the term ‘body count’ to describe how students compare their number of sexual partners in their lives. Molly, who shared her story in the introduction, tells us,

“Also, I think that is part of the male psyche at UT. The way that you solidify power at least, in Greek life, has a lot to do with how many women you've had sex with. They're even asked that as pledges. So, I think, for women on the flip side, at least in sororities, it's much more common to hear someone say, ‘Oh you've only had sex with one person, or you've never had sex before? Good for you!’ It's just a very different dynamic. Again, it's a classic double standard for men. It's cool for men, at UT, to hook up with all the girls, but it's not cool for a girl at UT to hook up with lots of guys.”

Students actively discuss their number of sexual partners and can inflict shame upon one another for not having enough sex or a high enough number of partners. Men who are “pledging” fraternities, or vying for membership, are often hazed, or coerced into performing unpleasant and unsafe activities, like drinking copious amounts of alcohol, receiving beatings, attempting nearly

impossible physical exercises, or biting the head off of a live hamster<sup>5</sup> (yes, that happened). A part of this pledging is asserting sexual dominance and experience, and men are pushed to reveal their number of sexual partners. If a man enters college with no previous sexual partners, he is shamed, and told that he must ‘lose his virginity’ as quickly as possible.

I asked Will if a part of expecting to hook up after a date event comes from many of the student’s friends attending the event and wanting to be able to brag about having sex the next day. He responds,

“Probably. Yes. Again, we're talking about such a nuanced subject, and people are so different. I think I have friends that wouldn't do that, or wouldn't feel that pressure, but I think there's also plenty of people that do feel that pressure.”

We started to dive deeper into sexual pressure in college and where it comes from. I began to ask him about how sexual activity contributes to one’s social presence. Describing coming to college and beginning to party and hook up with girls, he says,

“Look, you're entering a whole new social circle, where whatever your status was back in high school is not completely abandoned but you have to reestablish your presence. Sex is a big part of your identity in college, and your place in the hierarchy. Guys are super fascinated in how they set up a hierarchy within [their] social circles.

Freshmen and sophomore year... I think, sex is a huge part of it. Junior and senior year, I think that that is lost a little bit. That doesn't happen as often.”

Will’s words show how central one’s sexual activity is to their social standing. How often a student is having sex, and with whom, determines a guy’s status. This is especially true at the beginning of college. He further describes why sleeping with more women leads to more social capital, “While that social hierarchy is being established early in college, like talking about sex and things like that, it occurs more often because you're trying to

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<sup>5</sup> Haurwitz, Ralph K.M., Ralph K.M. Haurwitz, and Ryan Autullo. "UT Suspends Texas Cowboys for 6 Years for Hazing." Austin American-Statesman. March 28, 2019. Accessed May 12, 2019. <https://www.statesman.com/news/20190327/ut-suspends-texas-cowboys-for-6-years-for-hazing>.

communicate, oh, girls like me. There's a level of respect that comes along with that.”

According to Will, the ability to sleep with girls and tell your friends about it is a way of gaining respect within one’s social group.

### EVERYONE WANTED TO HAVE SEX WITH A GAMMA<sup>6</sup>

If having sex makes you cool, then does the person you had sex with make you cooler? Student’s discussed the social hierarchy at UT, specifically in Greek life and social organizations. Does one’s social ranking make them more vulnerable to campus sexual assault and why? Even outside of college, a person’s social standing influences their sexual desirability. Telling your buddies that you slept with a Dallas Cowboys Cheerleader or the lead singer in a pop band is more brag-worthy than a random person you met at a bar. I hypothesized that a socially intense, hierarchical student culture could turn students into trophies. Likelihood of sexual assault would be increased for students that are members of highly ranked social groups, including the top six sororities or ‘Big Six’, top five fraternities, dubbed the ‘Big Five’, student athletes, including cheerleading and dance, and prominent social organizations that act as university ambassadors, such as Texas Steers<sup>7</sup>

Alex, a senior fraternity member and Texas Steer, believes that he began receiving much more attention from women once he became a Steer. In fact, he thinks that this attention contributed to his own assault. When I noted that the social hierarchy influencing campus sexual assault can work both ways, he said, “Yeah and that actually happened to me.” While discussing the “macho” and “alpha male” ideals of fraternities and Steers, I asked Alex to explain to me why this culture influenced campus sexual assault:

“I guess is like the status aspect of it. It's like a big deal or whatever to be in one of those organizations. I don't want to suggest that like being those

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<sup>6</sup> Pseudonym

<sup>7</sup> Pseudonym

organizations means there's more sexual assault among people in those, but I personally noticed that since I have been in Steers, I've gotten way more attention from women, like substantially. I feel like with those organizations when there's, I guess increased sexual activity as a result of like the status of it, then I would assume that sexual assault follows."

Finding it interesting that Alex noted his organization membership as a contributing factor to increased sexual attention and activity, I asked him if social hierarchy influenced the culture of campus sexual assault, to which he replied, "Definitely. Like the Steers thing for one. I wouldn't be surprised if girls who are in the top sororities are statistically more likely to be assaulted." Curious as to how this social pattern manifests, I asked him if his friends brag about having sex with people in particular social groups or sororities. Alex answered,

"Yeah, for sure. I would say it was probably more prominent freshman year. Freshman year is when everyone kind of cared about that stuff. I mean I guess if someone had sex with someone on the cheerleading team. You know, when someone asks you about it, you would make it clear in addition to all the [sexual] details. Like, oh, she's on the cheer team. Or something like that. Oh, she's a [Gamma]. You would definitely add that in, but it's not like, 'I had sex with a [Gamma] man, holy fuck!' You know what I mean.

I would say that comes to mind freshman, sophomore year. Everyone wanted to have sex with the [Gammas.]"

However, students differed in their opinions on this issue. Some subjects believe that no such connection exists. These students said that their friends didn't often talk about these things, or if they did, it only mattered freshman and sophomore year. Such social rankings mattered then, because students were establishing themselves and their place on the social ladder, like Will described. But as upperclassmen, they no longer found these labels important.

Molly believed that my hypothesis was incorrect, because although power plays a role in campus sexual assault, students who are of higher social rank are *less* likely to be assaulted. She believes this is because they hold social capital, so it would not be strategic to take advantage of a such a student. Although Molly may be correct, it is important to remember that students may

not consciously know that they are sexually assaulting their partners if they have little to no understanding of consent.

## REBELLING BY PARTYING

Students of color have extra layers of experience on top of the student and party culture that Will describes. Simran does not get swept up in the intense pressure to go out, drink, and hook up in the intense way that Will describes. She is the kind of person that would rather relax and drink a beer with her friends or stay in with wine, snacks, and a movie.

At UT Austin, in addition to the traditional fraternities and sororities in the Interfraternity Council and University Panhellenic Council, there are multicultural sororities and fraternities. For example, there are multiple fraternities for Asian students and African American students. The culture that rules these chapters is different than traditional Greek life, which mostly consists of affluent, white students. Simran describes the way that South Asian students' perspective on campus sexual assault differs from other students,

“I know that's technically Greek life, but not really, [the South Asian] fraternities, sororities and everything like that. I think one thing that feeds into a lot of it is [many] South Asian parents are more restrictive at home, the whole Tiger Parent thing, so I think a lot more of them come to college and there's a natural stereotype of Indian kids coming to college and rebelling by partying, and drinking, and whatnot. There's this super common stereotype, and a lot of it is true, I've seen it personally, a lot of people I've known. I had chill parents in high school... but people who weren't as cool, people who were trapped at home, weren't really allowed to go out, go to college and rebel.”

For some students, the freedom of college can lead one to indulge. Among my own high school acquaintances with strict parents, when students get out of the house and dive into this new world with drinking and partying widely available without parental restriction, it is difficult for students to know their limits. When a parent punishes a child for drinking or staying out too late but does not allow that child to learn how and why



those behaviors should be practiced in moderation, the child has some catching up to do when arriving on campus. They have not learned how much alcohol they can handle and are surrounded by other students taking shot after shot. Without the space to learn about themselves before college, when they arrive, they can be swept up in the party culture's tide.

In addition, a culture of rebellion could form a similar party culture to the one Will described, in which students feel a pressure to go out, drink, and have sex, because everyone else is doing it. This kind of culture can lead to expectations of sex. Entering a party with the expectation of hooking up and having little to no knowledge of consent is a dangerous combination. In such cases, students can assume that their partner is also expecting sex and not know the proper steps to ask for consent.

### DON'T HAVE SEX UNTIL MARRIAGE

Simran is a student activist working to educate UT students on consent, university resources, how to support a survivor, and other knowledge needed to prevent and respond to campus sexual assault. In her work, she has tried to engage students of many backgrounds to bring them into her movement, including religious students. However, students for whom religion is important at UT oftentimes believe that their community members are not having sex before marriage, and therefore, they do not need consent education. However, the priest-abuse scandal rocking the Catholic church tells us that such a statement is not always true. Simran tells us about her experience trying to engage Christian students on campus:

“One problem I think actually there is on campus, and I found this when I was trying to reach out to different groups first semester, there are a lot of religious organizations, Christian organizations especially, who refuse to ... talk about rape and assault, because their whole thing is don't have sex until marriage

and when you're in a good, loving relationship. But one, there's abusive relationships of course, but they don't want to acknowledge that people go out drinking, people have sex before marriage, because they don't want to talk about that because it's ... I don't want to say antithetical to their religion, but not really what a Christian is supposed to do. They don't even want to be educated or informed about those topics.

There was this one church group that was like, okay we'd be interested in working with you, but it has to be about healthy relationships, which is great. But you're in college, there are people who are in relationships, but a lot of people aren't. Completely skipping over that and avoiding that... because that's not what 'good religious people' do, really is detrimental.

Yeah, people wouldn't reply to us. When they would, they would be like, oh that just not ... none of our members really would be interested in that."

Ensuring that I understood the conclusion she came to, I said, "Right, *none* of our members have sex, is what they would say, which is totally not true." To which Simran replied, "Right, which is not true."

Simran grew up in small-town Texas, surrounded by a religious culture that was averse to premarital sex. She describes for us how this culture impacted women and shaped residents' understanding of consent, coercion, and healthy relationships.

"I've read so many things [from people from home posting] stuff like, a husband provides for a woman so if he wants sex, she should give it to him. I have this friend who's gone super anti-feminism, he would favorite stuff [on] Facebook with these [Evangelicals] being like, your husband provides for you, therefore [he] should be able to have sex with [you] whenever he wants, that's your job as a woman. No, that's abusive, that's not okay. And they're like, they never have these conversations about what healthy relationships look like. What is marital rape, because that's a thing. So, they never know, and they never know what's going on."

Simran's point is that when we put sex in a corner labeled "for married people" and leave the rest of the community in the dark, people will be inhibited from forming healthy and safe ideas about sex, consent, and relationships. If there is not an open dialogue about these topics, then how are people supposed to learn? The result, she believes, is adults with a misinformed and even abusive perspective on sex within relationships and marriage.

# Chapter 3: Consent

## DEFINING CONSENT

Defining consent is deeply complex, so much so that a student could write entire thesis on one part of its definition. Before we dive into students' perspectives on consent, it is important to gain a solid understanding of how sex is defined by Texas's penal code, the UT Austin Title IX office, and how these definitions of consent formed.

Title IX is a federal civil rights law that was originally passed to give women equal opportunities in school sports but is now used to offer women equal educational opportunities in general. This office covers sexual assault allegations at universities nationwide. When I discuss only 6% of student survivors reporting to the university, this is the office that would handle the report. Organizations like Title IX that support survivors of sexual assault often define consent using affirmative terms. Texas state law, in comparison, takes a more lackadaisical stance, and only outlines instances in which consent is not present.

For example, the University of Texas Title IX Guide<sup>8</sup> definition imparts responsibility on each actor to ensure that their partner(s) give consent. Consent must be mutual and voluntary, and this agreement must be present to engage in *each* instance of sexual activity. For example, if a couple is kissing, and a partner wants to remove another's article of clothing, consent must be present, through a verbal or non-verbal cue. Consent can also be withdrawn at any time and any "expression of unwillingness" establishes a lack of consent. If the instance in which consent is given eliminates the person's free will, then the consent is not effective. Such instances include physical force or threats, intimidation, coercion, and incapacitation. Existence of a dating or

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<sup>8</sup> The University of Texas at Austin Title IX, "Responding to Sexual Misconduct: A Guide for The University Community," *University Compliance Services*. June 2018. <https://titleix.utexas.edu/> (accessed December 11, 2018).

sexual relationship or the person's dress does not "constitute consent."<sup>9</sup> It is important to know how UT Austin's reporting systems define consent before we hear how students define it in order to compare the two perspectives and understand how little education about the university policies students are getting.

The State of Texas's legal definition, however, is not as thorough. It does not include coercion, incapacitation, or intimidation. Incapacitation is particularly important because it can refer to students who are under the influence of alcohol or drugs beyond their personal limits and cannot consent to sexual activity. The Texas definition only refers to "unconsciousness or physical [inability] to resist." In reference to drugs and alcohol, Texas state law states if "the actor has intentionally impaired the other person...by administering any substance without the other person's knowledge,"<sup>10</sup> then the action is assault. These criteria do not bite into the center campus sexual assault: young students using copious amounts of drugs and alcohol to the point at which they cannot give consent clearly and consciously.

Assuming that consent is default and requiring its retraction is problematic due to biological and psychological reactions to fear. The concept of flight or fight is well-known: when humans are faced with a threat or stressor, innate biological systems trigger an instinct to flee or fight. Recent research shows that freeze, or "tonic immobility," is also a possible response:

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<sup>9</sup> "A voluntary, mutually understandable agreement that clearly indicates a willingness to engage in each instance of sexual activity. Consent to one act does not imply consent to another. Past consent does not imply future consent. Consent to engage in sexual activity with one person does not imply consent to engage in sexual activity with another. Consent can be withdrawn at any time. Any expression of an unwillingness to engage in any instance of sexual activity establishes a presumptive lack of consent. Consent is not effective if it results from: (a) the use of physical force, (b) a threat of physical force, (c) intimidation, (d) coercion, (e) incapacitation, or (f) any other factor that would eliminate an individual's ability to exercise free will to choose whether or not to engage in sexual activity. An individual's manner of dress or the existence of a current or previous dating or sexual relationship between two or more individuals does not, in and of itself, constitute consent to engage in a particular sexual activity. Even in the context of a relationship, there must be a voluntary, mutually understandable agreement that clearly indicates a willingness to engage in each instance of sexual activity."

<sup>10</sup> Rape, Abuse & Incest National Network, "Consent Laws," December 2017. <https://apps.rainn.org/policy/policy-crime-definitions-export.cfm?state=Texas&group=9> (accessed December 11, 2018).

“Similar to the flight/fight response, a freeze response is believed to have adaptive value. In the context of predatory attack, some animals will freeze or “play dead.” This response, often referred to as tonic immobility (Gallup, 1977), includes motor and vocal inhibition... Freezing in the context of an attack seems counterintuitive. However, tonic immobility may be the best option when the animal perceives little immediate chance of escaping or winning a fight”<sup>11</sup>

This response can occur during instances of sexual assault. “Many sexual assault survivors recall how, just seconds after registering the perpetrator’s behavior as an attack or upon emerging from a brief state of shock, their thinking was severely limited.”<sup>12</sup> Considering the freeze response, if we operate without affirmative consent laws, then what happens when a person’s consent is assumed, and they are too “frozen” to say no?

If students are partying, using drugs and alcohol, and hooking up, asking for consent verbally becomes even more important. The lack of University education on consent and resources further compounds the issue. Universities nation-wide give their students little to no sexual assault or consent education. At the University of Texas at Austin, Title IX cannot educate students at new student orientation because it would jeopardize the universities image as a safe school. Instead, universities cover themselves with a one-time, online educational program for students. Oftentimes, students click through the modules as quickly as possible, without focus, sometimes even while intoxicated. It is simply logical that in-person conversations with students are more impactful, memorable, and realistic than an online, animated program. At the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, after a sexual assault scandal of mishandled reports, students pressured university administration to reform their educational system. UMBC is one of

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<sup>11</sup> Norman B. Schmidt, et al. “Exploring Human Freeze Responses to a Threat Stressor,” *Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*, 39, no. 3 (2008), <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2489204/>.

<sup>12</sup> Jim Hopper, “Freezing During Sexual Assault and Harassment,” *Psychology Today*. Sussex Publishers, LLC, April 03, 2018. <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/sexual-assault-and-the-brain/201804/freezing-during-sexual-assault-and-harassment> (accessed December 11, 2018).

the first American universities moving away from the online model to in-person methods. The University President stated,

“UMBC would start implementing mandatory training for students, faculty and staff on campus. He said the training would be in-person and live, rather than only online, and would focus on areas such as trauma, prevention and what happens during the reporting process after an incident.”<sup>13</sup>

University administrators know that in-person, mandatory education is more impactful and beneficial, but requires more funding, staff, and resources. Administrations are making intentional choices to do the bare minimum in educating their students.

### I DON'T ASK BECAUSE I ASSUME

Oftentimes people assume that they have their partners' consent, rather than asking for it. Many subjects expressed that if something is not okay with their partner in a sexual encounter, then they expect their partner to tell them. Therefore, they do not feel that they need to ask for their partner's consent before engaging in sexual activity. However, placing the responsibility on the receiver to call out, rather than on the actor to ask, heightens the risk of sexual assault or rape. In addition, almost all students expressed that they did not know how they came to this definition of consent and did not have any consent education outside of the student-led, peer education program from Not On My Campus.

Verbal consent is key to avoiding miscommunication and assault. It is unethical to touch or use another person's body without their permission. This is reflected in our medical patient consent standards. Our community's assumption that everyone's body is sexually fair game, and we don't need to ask before touching it in a sexual way, is a strong symbol of our disrespectful

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<sup>13</sup> Cody Boteler, “UMBC president: 'We need to do much more' regarding sexual assault on campus,” *The Baltimore Sun*. Tribune Publishing Company, October 12, 2018, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/maryland/baltimore-county/ph-ca-at-umbc-president-assault-20181012-story.html> (accessed December 12, 2018).

and sometimes unhealthy perspective on sex. All of our bodies are on the table, and no one thinks to ask before touching them.

In interviews, I asked subjects about when they verbally ask for their partner's consent throughout a series of sexual activities. It is important to note that in this population, women believe that oral sex is foreplay and should occur before intercourse. However, there are various sexual norms among different communities regarding the escalating order of sexual activities. For example, in some religious communities that place particular importance on a female's intact hymen and vaginal virginity, women can engage in anal sex and be considered a virgin. Because of the wide variety of sexual preferences and perspectives on which activities are most intimate or off-limits, asking for a partner's consent to move from one activity to another is essential. A person who consents to oral sex might not also want to have intercourse. Jumping into sexual interactions without knowing your partner makes consent more important and mandatory, because there are no boundaries established.

First, I asked if students would ask for their partner's consent before they touched them, then kissed them, removed their clothing, touched an area of their body generally considered private (breasts, buttocks, or genitals), engaged in oral sex, and engaged in intercourse. The answers from students varied significantly. Some, like Alex, who described the QB sneak and social hierarchy, would ask his partner before kissing them in order to avoid embarrassment or rejection. However, if he and his partner reciprocally performed oral sex, then he did not feel the need to ask for consent before intercourse. A section of the interview transcript from this conversation, condensed for clarity, is below:

Me: Do you ask for consent before oral sex?

Alex: Like, I'll say "Can I go down on you?" 'Cause I think it would be weird if I just kind of went and did it.

Me: People do that.

Alex: I'm sure they do. Yeah. No, for sure with the oral sex. It's kind of the same with like kissing for me.

Me: And then I'm assuming, with intercourse you usually ask?

Alex: Not all the time. But like I said, if we've come a certain distance and you're naked in my bed and we've like gone down on each other (reciprocal oral sex) or something, I'm not necessarily assuming that I can have sex with you, but I'm going to try. And if there's any resistance or you say, "I don't want to," or something like that, then I'll stop. But I don't explicitly ask, "Can I have sex with you?"

Me: So, you usually just go for it.

Alex: I would say I go for it after examining the situation. Like, thinking that it's appropriate.

Me: Do you ask if you should put on a condom?

Alex: No.

Me: You just do it...

Alex: Well, okay. No. So that's another one of those things where it's like, if they'll say something. And I know that's probably not the right thing to do. I probably shouldn't rely on that. But I am being honest... I have been just amazed at how no one uses condoms as much as I thought. Maybe it's like the people.

Me: No one uses condoms, I agree.

Alex: Right? Because I assume, they're on birth control. I don't ask because I assume that if I am having sex with you without a condom then you're probably okay with it because you're on birth control or something like that.

Me: There's a lot of steps. You really should ask.

Alex: It's a lot of steps [and] this shouldn't always be the girl's responsibility, I'll admit. But if I am having sex with you without a condom, I have assumed that it's okay. That not to say that [I'd] finish (ejaculate) inside someone. But I am assuming that we've got some of the bases covered if you're letting me do it. You know what I mean? Some of the bases covered in that you're taking birth control or some other thing like birth control.

I found Alex's perspective deeply concerning. It is apparent that he sees his behavior as normal, meaning that many students at the university are probably engaging in similar behavior, because Alex had to get this from someone, somewhere. The issue with his method is the lack of communication. As noted above, there is a psychologically documented pattern of a freeze response when a person is scared or intimidated. If a person is in a vulnerable situation, like naked in bed with someone who they do not know well, then they could be more likely to freeze. In addition, Alex is often engaging in this activity with partners he does not know well or met very recently, like at a party or bar. There is no way for him to know their personal, nonverbal



consent signals, like body language, facial expression, vocal expression, or head nodding. To make matters worse, not only are these partners usually people that Alex has little personal relationship with, but also both people are often intoxicated. If these people met at a party or a bar, and we know what student alcohol and drug use looks like, then Alex's bedroom becomes a perfect storm. Two young students who barely know each other, intoxicated, and not asking for their partner's consent. How is anyone in this situation supposed to know whether or not their partner is consenting to the activity? Why are students assuming their partner's consent?

If students had proper, thorough consent education that actually stuck, maybe college wouldn't look like this. From Alex's nonchalant tone and demeanor, we know that he thinks that this is completely normal and appropriate. He is not a monster set out to sexually assault women, he's a kid who no one told that he needed to ask his partner's for consent. As we will learn in our section on consent education, it is no surprise that Alex took this approach, because it is normal and ubiquitous in his community, and nobody told him to just ask.

Molly, the sexual assault survivor who opened the thesis, has a definition of consent that isn't startlingly far from Alex's. She says,

"Honestly, I know there's a black and white definition, but I think it really depends on the scenario. I don't think if you don't get verbal consent that it's sexual assault or rape at all. I don't think that you need to communicate that verbally but it's nice to. I don't know. I think it's just a general enthusiasm for sex is consent. In the moment, if you... I don't think it's hard to tell when someone is into it or not into it. I think a guy knows when a girl is being quiet and is not being touchy feely, and is not being forward, that you shouldn't be having sex with her. I don't think guys are idiots.

I think girls give plenty of nonverbal cues that they don't want to have sex. I don't think it's their fault if they don't say verbally stop, I don't want to do this. I think there are opportunities where that should've been communicated before. I don't know. I think it depends. I would define consent as a general enthusiasm to have a sexual encounter. It should include a verbal yes, but I don't think it always has to."

Molly is completely right when she says sometimes verbal consent is a smart move. To be safe, verbal consent should be the standard in sexual encounters with new people, especially when there are alcohol or drugs involved. The thesis of this section is not that verbal consent *must* be present in every sexual encounter, only that asking is an important safeguard to ensure that consent is present in high risk situations, like new or intoxicated partners. Ideally, we would all ask for our partner's consent in every case, but this is a big ask considering the status quo of consent culture. In established relationships, students often stop asking for consent because they have a keen sense for their partner's nonverbal signals and cues. Will, the student activist who told us about party culture, said,

“I don't want to say it's okay to not ask every single time. But I've been in relationships where we don't talk about it every single time and I don't feel guilty about it. I feel like there was always consent there.”

Ideally, continuous partners will verbally and directly establish with one another when they no longer feel a need to verbally ask for consent every time. This does not mean that sexual assault and rape cannot occur within relationships, only that miscommunications are less likely to occur. An individual can still revoke consent within the confines of the relationship. A person should be familiar enough with their partner's signals to sense discomfort and ask for consent if necessary. Bottom line: don't engage in sexual activity with anyone unless you're sure that they are okay with it. It's that simple.

It should also be noted that my commentary on unhealthy sexual behavior is limited to traditional interpersonal relationships. I do not mean to say we should in any way shame people for their decisions to engage in or enjoy physical sex without emotional attachment and with clear, consensual communication. All people should have the autonomy to use their body in whatever ways they please, sexually or otherwise. I only mean to say that bodily autonomy

includes the opportunity to give or retract consent in sexual encounters. Moreover, our hypersexual student culture is causing us to *assume* that sex is unemotional, and consent is a given. Such sexual relationships should not be our default setting, because they lead to disastrous miscommunications regarding consent.

## I SHOULDN'T BE HAVING SEX IN THE FIRST PLACE

Students struggle to understand how consent functions in the presence of alcohol. They do not know if they can give consent while intoxicated or when to draw the line between conscious consent and when one is too drunk to give consent. In this section we will explore how students view the relationship between consent and substances.

Many students expressed that they can wake up next to someone, not remember having sex with them, and have no feelings of trauma. They are hesitant to label the experience as sexual assault. Because so many students have drunken or “blackout” sex, the practice is quite normalized, and student often do not associate those experiences with sexual assault or rape. However, if we agree that a person needs to be capable of making informed decisions in order to give consent, then those who are having sex while severely intoxicated are likely not giving meaningful consent. Meaningful consent means not only giving an affirmative yes, but also having the capacity to give that yes. If the person does not have the capacity to consent meaningfully, then that consent can be considered invalid, and the experience can be considered assault. Unfortunately, students have little knowledge of this nuance and are unable to juggle it. Will, the fraternity member who gave us a thorough background on student party culture, says,

“No one understands the relationship between alcohol and consent. I would say that I don't even understand it. I've gone through a ton of education programs and stuff that you've given me, that people on the Not On My Campus (NOMC) board explained to me. Let me give you my picture of it and what it is in my head.

There's a spectrum of drunkenness. You go from being sober to being absolutely blackout, passed out. Potentially alcohol poisoning and going to the hospital. You pass through these stages of drunkenness where you lose motor ability, you lose the ability to think critically, your agency to make decisions you lose at some point. Then, moves on from there to blacking out and stuff. Everyone passes through that spectrum at different rates.

At UT, you're going on date events with people that you've never seen drunk before. While I know how many drinks I can have, and I know how many drinks my friends can have, and even how many drinks the girls that I've dated have. I don't know that of random people that I meet. We're asking people when they go home from these parties and these date events to judge where someone that they don't know is on that spectrum and to decide whether or not I can ask them for consent. That just seems so flawed to me because I don't understand how you make that decision. It scares the shit out of me because it makes me think back to before I had all of this education. I was asking myself those questions but was I always making the right judgment call?

It's really scary. The fact that there's really no way to accurately judge how drunk someone is other than giving them a breathalyzer test. You're not going to keep a breathalyzer on your bedside table, so how do you go through this? Right?

You have this really nuanced decision you have to make of how drunk this person is. I consider myself someone who is pretty well-educated on consent and things like that. I don't fully understand it. How am I going to get up in front of fifty 18-year-old guys and how am I going to explain that to them? How are they going to understand that? I don't know if I can explain it to my friends, my best friends.”

Will is completely right. It is scary how little students know about a complicated decision that they are making every weekend.

As Molly told me about her freshman year sexual assault, which we discussed in the introduction, I asked her how she feels about the experience now. She told me that she does not think that she has many lasting feelings or trauma. In response, I noted how variable the psychological reactions can be. Some people who experience sexual assault can wake up after a drunk night next to someone that they don't know and feel nothing. Agreeing with me, she said,

“That's my roommate. Half the time when she would have sex with people freshman year, I'd be like, ‘Dude, you were so fucking loud. Why are you having sex when I'm in the room?’ She's like, ‘I didn't have sex with anyone.’ I'm like, ‘Yes, you did. I heard it. I was right there.’ She was like, ‘Hm, interesting.’ Did not phase her at all. Very interesting. I agree.”

Campus sexual assault is complex because many people, policymakers and administrators think that most rape is violent, man jumps out of the bushes, knife-point rape, and it's not. Especially on college campuses. It's often two kids that are drunk and know little to nothing about consent. The students have drunken sex with each other, and sometimes they're fine, and sometimes it traumatizes them. Molly believes that students who are eager for sex, and do not understand why meaningful consent is important, take advantage of this consent loophole. This quote from her description of drinking culture illustrates this pattern:

“I also think the reason why the punch is so strong is so that girls will get too drunk, and not be able to consent. I really think that is intentional... Guys like, thrive when girls are getting drunk at their parties, because they think that they become easy targets. Because they think girls become more willing when they're drunk, and well I guess that's it. They think that girls become more willing to have sex with them when they're drunk, therefore, they should take advantage of them. That's what they think.”

Molly believes that the men making the party punch are aware that drunkenness lowers their potential partners inhibitions and makes it easier to have sex at the end of the night.

Learning about meaningful consent was helpful to Molly as she started to unpack her own assault,

“The idea of meaningful consent, I think meant a lot to me, when I started hearing that. I was like clearly if I don't remember it, I shouldn't be having sex in the first place.”

For Molly and those around her, education about meaningful consent came too late. Instead, a young student did not know that Molly was too drunk to consent and did not have the tools to ask. Giving students the lessons that they need to enter sexual encounters safely is key to improving their safety and wellbeing.

MY PARENTS DIDN'T DO ANY OF THAT

Simran believes that her South Asian culture's perspective on sex leads to a lack of consent education. She claims the environment that these students come from, where sex is a taboo topic, makes it more difficult to have conversations about safe sex and consent. Simran says that many South Asian students enter college with little to no knowledge of consent and do not know its definition. She says, "A lot of people don't even know the complete definition of consent. Because it goes back to you don't talk about that in South Asian culture at all. That's not a thing we talk about."

Simran's description interested me because it is one of the few present-day examples of sexual conservatism that this research accessed. All of the subjects in this research are sexually active. The majority of them are members of Greek life, an environment in which sex is commonplace and can be discussed openly, often, and sometimes even in a vulgar manner. While we can hypothesize that the campus sexual assault epidemic is in part caused by a new, casual and sometimes emotionless perspective on sex, or at least the mainstream practice of this perspective, Simran provided an example of what can happen on the other end of the sex-positivity spectrum, when sex is taboo. Sex positivity is a movement to perceive sex as a positive experience rather than a stigmatized, sinful, or bad one. Although students hopping into bed without a conversation about consent is concerning, viewing sex as wrong or stigmatized is not a healthy alternative.

When parents and children are unable to discuss safe sexual norms, those students go off to college, and as Simran described, rebel with partying and drinking, and sex without a basic knowledge of consent. Simran describes this pattern,

"Sex and consent. I feel like I know so many [white] people whose parents gave them the pill or had 'the talk' to them before coming to college. My parents didn't

do any of that. A lot of [South Asian] people I know, their parents didn't do anything like that. When I wanted to go on birth control, I had to tell my mom it was for my periods... They come in a little less prepared... I don't even know if there's more than three Asians in the history of UT who's reported to Title IX. I would not be surprised if it's very, very low, because students already don't want to report, but there's an additional cultural pressure not to report. For example, Muslim Honor Code, if you report or accused your partner of rape or something, that actually violates the Muslim Honor Code.”

This is just one example of the many reasons why students do not have adequate sex education. It is important that we highlight what the educational environment looks like for students from a variety of backgrounds, cultures, and families. Simran is careful to clarify that not all South Asian families or people perpetuate this stigma. She describes her family members that are comfortable talking about sex and relationships. She believes that a more conservative attitude towards sex is more common in rural Indian communities. People from urban places are often more progressive. She believes that regressive attitudes are generational and young people do not think sex is as taboo as their elders. Simran’s experience with South Asian culture is just one iteration of a larger issue: students are entering college and having sex without thorough consent education.

The data on sexual assault in Asian demographic groups corroborates Simran’s claim that there is an issue in her culture that is different from the rest of the population. Simran is a well-educated sexual assault prevention activist who knows her facts and data. She says,

“The rates are a lot higher. [Asian Family Support Services Austin], when they presented to me in my training, the stat they gave us was 40 to 60 percent of Asian/Pacific Islander women are victims of sexual violence or intimate partner violence. I think the biggest thing is, one I feel like Asian students come into college with a lot less knowledge. I definitely felt like I had a lot less knowledge than my white friends.”

Simran's resolve and courage as she tells me her story is impressive. As she describes her culture and the homes her friends were raised in, her contrast with this background intensifies. As she talks to me, she seems like she is finally telling a truth she was holding in because she did not have an outlet to share it. Simran's story is intersectional.

Intersectionality is a term coined by the black feminist scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. It is defined as, "The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage."<sup>14</sup> Intersectionality sought to describe the experience of people who identified with more than one marginalized social group, and therefore had a stacked or layered experience of oppression. For example, white women founded the feminist movement and considered women's rights incompatible with race as they fought for suffrage. Winning the vote for people of color and winning the vote for women were separate social movements. Women of color, however, did not fall into one category or the other, they had to fight twice in order to win the same rights that the white founders had from the beginning.

Simran is a part of two marginalized populations: a woman, and a person of color. Her identity as a woman, and her identity as Indian, are sometimes confined to their two environments in a vacuum. But the space in which they intersect is where Simran exists and her story lives. Giving her the space to talk about her intersectional story, anyone could see how she burst with enthusiasm and passion when given the platform to express her unique perspective. In her own activism, she is oftentimes surrounded by white students trying to prevent and respond to sexual assault. She is trying to recruit more

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<sup>14</sup> Cjr. "The Origin of the Term 'intersectionality'." Columbia Journalism Review. Accessed May 12, 2019. [https://www.cjr.org/language\\_corner/intersectionality.php](https://www.cjr.org/language_corner/intersectionality.php).



people who look like her into the movement but struggles as Asian American students dubbed her student organization too white.

## I THINK THAT THEY SAW IT AS RIGHT IN THEIR MINDS

A central question of this thesis is are students' sexually assaulting each other intentionally, or because they don't know enough about consent? In this section, we will explore how students are learning about consent and how effective that education is.

The vast majority of students did not mention learning about consent from the University of Texas at Austin. Although the university does a skit about consent at orientation and forces students to complete an Alcohol Edu online module before the beginning of their freshman year, students do not take this education to heart. The skit is a one-time, unrealistic representation of student party and hookup culture. It is conducted under the umbrella and oversight of the university, so students can easily brush it off as out of touch and inconsistent with students' perspective. I asked students how they came to their definition of consent if they ever received any consent education. Most students said no. Some said that they received consent education from Not On My Campus's peer education program, a friend that is well educated on consent, or from reading about the #MeToo movement online. Anyone that remembers their freshman year consent education thought that it was below satisfactory. For example, I asked Simran, "Without Not on My Campus, have you ever received any consent education?" She replied, "No. The PowerPoint that everyone had to take freshmen year, but no." When she says PowerPoint, I believe she is referring to Alcohol Edu, which uses a format similar to PowerPoint slides. I continued, "And you don't think that was effective?" Simran said, "No, I don't even remember what was in it."

Although the University of Texas at Austin could do more, they are at least bringing up the topic of consent and sexual assault during student orientation. Most universities in Texas don't talk about the topic at all, as it is not legally required for American colleges to write a policy against sexual assault or distribute it to students. Schools would rather just sweep the issue under the rug, in order to avoid being labeled the "rape school" a term coined by Jon Krakauer in his book on sexual assault at the University of Montana.<sup>15</sup> If universities talk about the problem too much, then prospective students and parents will know that it is an issue at the school and stop sending their kids there.

If the University is giving students some education though, why aren't they taking it to heart? Vanessa, who explained the power dynamic of hookup culture to us, says,

"I think the university needs to do more, but also get students to listen, 'cause you can stay a lot, like even with the curriculum that they have, it's not great, but it's curriculum, but just no one really cares about it, so it's hard... Just, no one really cares about it, so it's hard to ... As hard as it is to get the information out there, it's harder to get people to care. Because most people don't care until it's happened to them, and then it's too late..

I didn't think it would ever happen to me. Just like how I don't think someone in my family's going to get hurt in a freak accident, or that my house is going to burn down. You don't think that like bad things are going to happen to you, and like you think you know how to keep yourself generally safe, and things happen...

It's like you never really prepare yourself for preventing bad things because, in general, they don't always happen. I think sexual assault seems even more like an abstract idea to people, because people really haven't talked about it until recently, and still, like what people see as sexual assault, which is the big scary, forceful, horrible, like dramatic things, are still not that common. You don't ever feel the need to prepare yourself from someone jumping out at you and pushing you against the wall and raping you."

The handful of students who mentioned remembering education from the University or Not On My Campus noted that many students did not take it to heart because didn't think that

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<sup>15</sup> Jon Krakauer, *Missoula: Rape and the Justice System in a College Town*. (New York: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group, 2015.)

they would ever experience or commit sexual assault. This perspective highlights students' misunderstanding of what sexual assault looks like and how frequently it occurs. Campus sexual assault is often not violent rape and is almost always committed by a friend, acquaintance or partner. In fact, the National Institute of Justice states, "About 85 to 90 percent of sexual assaults reported by college women are perpetrated by someone known to the victim; about half occur on a date."<sup>16</sup> However, because incoming students do not know that more than one in five women are sexually assaulted on campus and the assaulters are usually their dates, they do not think that they need to listen, and assume that they already know what consent means.

I asked students if they think that perpetrators know that they're committing sexual assault, and the overwhelming answer was no. That's the point of education scarcity we're dealing with: students raping one another and not even knowing it. Vanessa explained to me what she thinks would cause a student to assault their sexual partner,

"I think there are kind of two factors that could cause it. I think it would be ignorance in not really knowing that what they're doing constitutes a sexual assault, and not knowing the consequences of it. [Also] I think that there are people that are perpetuating sexual assault could just kind of see it as normal. I don't think they feel that they're assaulting women, I think that like they feel themselves deserving of sex or whatever they're asking.

I don't think they think they're hurting women. I think that they saw it as right in their minds. They thought they got the permission they needed, which obviously is not consent, but that's what they felt was consent. Even if even if they were being violent or drugged someone, I think that they felt that it was not so terrible to do so because of the power that they had over the woman or the other person...

I can't know what goes on in their minds exactly, but I do genuinely think that a lot of perpetrators of sexual assault don't think they did anything wrong. Their mind is not telling them, oh I know this is bad that I'm going to do it anyway. I think that they actually don't see anything wrong with what they did, which is just as big of a problem, if not more of a problem, because if you don't know you did something wrong, it's two times the steps because first you have to teach them that it's wrong and then get them to feel bad for it. Yeah, it's even harder to overcome."

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<sup>16</sup> "Most Victims Know Their Attacker." National Institute of Justice. Accessed May 12, 2019. <https://www.nij.gov/topics/crime/rape-sexual-violence/campus/pages/know-attacker.aspx>.

Students have little to know idea what the definition of consent is: a voluntary, mutually understandable agreement that clearly indicates a willingness to engage in each instance of sexual activity.<sup>17</sup> In fact, they are so unaware, that they often commit or experience sexual assault and are unable to define the encounter as abnormal or wrong. Although an alarming number of sexual assaults occur on college campuses, and universities should be taking steps to mitigate this crisis, the responsibility does not fall only on their shoulders. Will, the senior who explained fraternity party culture, thinks,

“On the education side, I think education should be mandated for all of this. I think the university has a duty to mandate sexual assault and prevention education. That's not something that happens right now... They have a duty to educate people for this. Look, it's almost too late once people get to the university to educate them on this stuff. Maybe universities need to have, or someone has a duty, to sponsor education earlier than your college years. I don't know who that would be.

Maybe it's your middle schools or high schools. It should be every dad in the country, but it's not. I don't think the university has a duty to educate earlier than the college years because I don't know how that would work, but someone does. Someone has a duty to be doing that... I believe in that sex education in middle school should be completely redesigned and consent should definitely be a part of it. We've got to talk about these things earlier than right now...

People have sex in middle school. What you learn from dad when you're five years old shapes how you think about girls when you're 25. It needs to start earlier.”

Now that we understand how uneducated and confused college students are about consent, and how their party culture and sexual behavior increases their risk of unclear, drunken, nonconsensual sexual experiences, we can approach subjects' stories of sexual assault with a strong foundation of student life, consent, and how the epidemic got this bad.

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<sup>17</sup> The University of Texas at Austin Title IX, “Responding to Sexual Misconduct: A Guide for The University Community,” *University Compliance Services*. June 2018. <https://titleix.utexas.edu/> (accessed December 11, 2018).

## Chapter 4: Assault

### DON'T GO UPSTAIRS WITH A BOY

Equipped with a perspective on student culture and a lesson on the intricacies of consent, we will now discuss actual experiences of sexual assault. The central purpose of this thesis is to shed light on the untold, unreported stories of sexual assault survivors on UT-Austin's campus. With only 6% of UT Austin students reporting to the university and 3% reporting to police, this study sought an alternative platform to display these experiences in an honest and low stakes environment. While an investigation holds students' reputations and future careers on the line, the ability to discuss instances of campus sexual assault without repercussions and with complete anonymity provided candid, honest documentation of cases beyond the 6%. We will discuss the stories of subjects who are survivors of sexual assault in this chapter.

Vanessa, who hypothesized what would lead a student to perpetuate assault, has thought over this question a lot since she was raped her first night of college. Vanessa's experience is a strong example of the many stories we heard from subjects about some of their first times drinking and sexually engaging with others in college taking a dark turn. We will begin with her story in her own words and discuss some of the important lessons from her experience. Then, we will explore student experiences slightly different from Vanessa's, for example, coercive long-term relationships and male survivors. When I asked Vanessa if she could tell me about her experience, she took me through that night, beginning to the end, in detail:

"My experience was right at the start of college. It was something that I never thought I would ever experience or deal with. I thought I was far too smart, knowledgeable, level headed, and aware enough that I would never experience it. But mine happened on bid day which is the day that girls get into their sororities. And that night the girls go to frat houses to party with all their new sisters and friends and all that fun stuff. It's definitely a very exciting moment for a lot of

girls because they find a bunch of new friends that day, they get to experience their first college party that day, it's just a big welcome to college you could say.

I drank in high school before prom and homecoming and a couple other times, but I was like really into sports and stuff and studied really hard. I just hadn't really gotten into partying in high school because of lack of time or whatever other reasons. Going to a college party was definitely very new to me. I also hadn't ever gone to a college party before because I heard that sororities could blacklist<sup>18</sup> you if you had gone to a party before going to college. So, I never [went] with my brother to a college party before. I didn't want to get in trouble. Whatever.

So that day was my first true college party and really my first time with that whole experience. So naturally as many people do on bid day I got really, really, really drunk”

At this point, I interject and say, “also an underaged person was giving you copious amounts of alcohol.” Because as a former sorority member, I know that a current member is assigned to a new member, or a “bid day buddy.” The current member’s job is to make sure that the new member has fun, meets new people, stays safe, goes to the best fraternity party, and provides her with alcohol for the night. Vanessa responds,

“But I mean that part I don't see that's something inherently wrong. I think that everyone gets excited to drink. I don't see drinking as necessarily as a problem with regret or with college kids in general.

So as long as people are being taken care of, I don't think that is an issue. But I did get really drunk and I was talking to people in my brother's fraternity, where I already knew a bunch of [members]. But I was meeting new people too and of course this being my brother's fraternity I didn't have any alarms in my head worrying about any of these guys. I did not have any distrust for any of them because they were all my brother's friends and I trust my brother and I trust his friends.

I was talking to one guy and eventually we were just talking to each other. And he asked me to go upstairs and **my mom had always told me, ‘Don't go upstairs with a boy.’ But I was in college and my mom wasn't there.** And I knew I didn't want to have sex with someone because I'd only ever had sex with one other person. But **I was telling myself as I was going up there like, ‘I'm going to say I don't want to have sex and if he's not okay with that then I'll**

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<sup>18</sup> Blacklist: To ban a potential new member (PNM) from joining any sorority across campus or place them on a “blacklist.” This is an informal process conducted secretly between sororities. For example, a high school student attends a college party, a sorority member sees her kissing another member’s boyfriend. The high schooler’s name is given to all of the other sororities, so all of the houses know not to extend membership to her, because she committed this social faux pas. I have never heard of this actually happening, but it is a rumor that high schoolers are often concerned about.

**leave.** But I'm just going to put it out there and everything will be fine because I'm laying out my expectations.'

I went up there and he gave me another drink. Like another shot. And I didn't see a problem at the time because I had in my head that I was going to say what I was going to say. **Whatever. Nothing bad is happening. He's been very nice and respectful. It's fine.**

Then we started to hook up and I could tell ... Well I couldn't tell at the time, but I could tell in hindsight that I was extremely drunk because when I said that I didn't want to have sex my voice was very slurred. **The words were out, it was said, there was no way that he didn't hear what I said.** But now I can just tell how incapacitated I was at the time. And I said I didn't want to have sex and he said, 'No problem.' I was like, 'Great. Sounds great to me.' I was like, 'Cool. He got it. I said it. We're fine.'

So, I kept hooking up with him because I'd said what I needed to say. And then we were mid-hookup and he asked again. Or he didn't ask again because he didn't ask the first time, I told him. But he asked if I wanted to have sex and I said no. And I shook my head. And so since I said it again it was very clear and I was like, 'We're good. We're fine.' And then we're still hooking up and all the sudden I felt him having sex with me.

Every reaction from then on to some people, to uneducated people, they'd be like, 'You didn't do anything to really protest it.' But as educated people like you and myself would know, **I was drunk to the point that I could not lift my head up.** So, the fact that I even got any words out was probably really good on my part. I was shocked. I was really thrown off guard. But I remember I didn't feel immediately horrified. I just felt shocked. And I asked if he had a condom on and he said, 'Oh, you want me to put a condom on? Okay, I'll go put one on.'

Even then I can't tell you for what reason ... I'm going to put it off for mostly the reason that I'm so drunk that I was just lying there pretty much motionless. But he presumably put a condom on. I am still unsure but I'm going to give him the benefit of the doubt and say he did. And he continued to have sex with me until he was done, I guess.

And I never screamed out or protested or anything. It just happened and then he was done. I remember right afterwards I immediately felt like I was going to vomit, and I told him. I was like, 'I feel sick. I feel sick. Can I have some water?' And he got me water. And I was so drunk that I missed my mouth and spilled it everywhere, all over myself, all over the bed. Then I repeated, I was like, 'I feel sick. I feel sick.' So, he had to help me get dressed. And basically, as soon as I was dressed, I ran out of the room into the hallway because I knew there was a trashcan there and I thought I was going to throw up. And I ended up just sitting in the hallway and eventually a couple of girls in my sorority came upstairs and found me.

Apparently, I had been missing for a long time because I had gone upstairs. People really weren't upstairs. People were at the party. So people were very worried about me. Luckily, they found me. I went into the bathroom where I told them what happened. I did throw up but not bad[sic]. And yeah, that's how that happened.

Then a couple people walked me home that night. I remember I didn't even check my phone until the next morning just 'cause I was in a state of incoherence. Both because I was trying to process what happened to me but also because I was so drunk that I was just in a really unstable position until the morning. And that morning I remember I read a text from my brother that was sent at like 2AM the night of and was like, 'Where are you? I've heard people are looking for you.' And I remembered I responded to him like, 'Oh I'm fine. I just wasn't checking my phone. Sorry. I had a good time.' Which was weird. But that doesn't really have any relevance to the story, it was just weird."

## IF WE DON'T HAVE SEX, I'M GOING TO LEAVE

In our chapter on student culture, Simran told us about growing up in small-town Texas and why a community lacking discussion about sex and consent could lead to unhealthy and abusive relationships in the future. Although we can't be certain if Simran's experience was due to growing up in this environment, or simply by chance, her first relationship in college was an abusive one with a partner who coerced her into sex.

Her relationship ended a long time ago, but just before her interview began, she still looked over her shoulder and said, "I'm just making sure he's not around anywhere. All right, you're good." Once she's in the clear though, she overflows with knowledge and emotion. I asked her if she ever experienced sexual harassment or assault, unsure if she placed her relationship experience in those categories. She responded, "Of course it's assault, yes." I asked her to elaborate on her experience and she dived in head-first, describing the sexual coercion she experienced. She tells me,

"I was in a relationship and I didn't know what exactly coercion was, or anything like that. But I was in a relationship with this boy, and I wasn't... really ready to have sex, ... but he would be like, if we don't have sex I'm going to leave, I have other stuff to do. I was in love with this kid, so I was like, okay whatever. He would be like, anytime I would say no he would throw a temper tantrum and get ... he's like six-four, really big kid. I'm very tiny compared to him, so I would get super scared. He would not talk to me for days if I said no... He would not talk to me for days if I said no. Once I felt uncomfortable and I asked him to leave, and he didn't talk to me for a week. He told me I was crazy and made me



apologize, all this stupid stuff. Every single time, probably more than forty, fifty times in a seven-month span, so very, very frequent.”

So, Simran would say yes, because she didn’t want her partner to leave and she felt physically intimidated. As we know from her previous statements on a lack of conversation about healthy relationships and consent in her South Asian family and in her deeply religious hometown, Simran was never taught that this behavior was abnormal or unacceptable. Both her and her partner thought that this was an appropriate way to conduct a relationship. He thought that he deserved sex from his girlfriend, similar to Simran’s previous quote about people from her hometown believing that, “Your husband provides for you, therefore he should be able to have sex with you whenever he wants, that's your job as a woman.” Simran fell victim to this rhetoric, too, and thought that her boyfriend’s behavior was normal.

The Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women’s Health defines sexual coercion as, “unwanted sexual activity that happens when you are pressured, tricked, threatened, or forced in a nonphysical way. Coercion can make you think you owe sex to someone. It might be from someone who has power over you...No person is ever required to have sex with someone else.”<sup>19</sup> Simran fits this definition. Her boyfriend threatened to leave her if she did not have sex with him. His mere size made her feel threatened, and she explicitly describes feelings of fear that caused her to comply.

### THAT'S COERCION

While she was in the relationship, she says, “At that point I didn't really realize that there was anything wrong with that.” Comparing it to what she knew, before she had a deeper understanding of consent and coercion, she says, “I was just like, oh guys will be guys.”

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<sup>19</sup> "What Is Sexual Coercion." Womenshealth.gov. March 14, 2019. Accessed May 12, 2019. <https://www.womenshealth.gov/relationships-and-safety/other-types/sexual-coercion>.

She tells me about her perspective on sex and consent at that point in her life. Growing up in a community where sex was taboo, then coming to college and entering a new relationship, where was the opportunity for her to learn about healthy relationships and consent? She elaborates,

“I didn't realize that throwing a temper tantrum until someone gives in is technically considered assault. That's coercion. You're not allowed to do that. You're not allowed to beg someone or get mad at them sic[‘til] they say yes. I didn't realize that was a thing until later.”

When her partner began to sexually coerce her, she thought that this was normal. In almost every instance of sexual assault described by subjects, the survivor did not know that what happened to them was assault until long after the fact, because had no template of healthy sex to compare themselves. When sex was non-consensual, subjects described feelings of distress, panic attacks, flashbacks, discomfort, and fear of their perpetrator, but did not conclude that the experience was a sexual assault until days, weeks, or months after the encounter.

An exception to this pattern is Vanessa, who immediately knew that she experienced rape. She is also the only subject who claims that she verbally told her perpetrator ‘no.’ Vanessa is the only subject to receive a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam, a collection of medical evidence that should be performed within a few days after the assault. Students’ lack of consent education barred them from understanding what happened to them, blocking their access to rapid-response healthcare. We will discuss this issue further in our section on SAFE exams.

Simran believes that if she told friends or family about the relationship, then they would have told her that it was abusive. She tells us about why she didn’t discuss her relationship with her friends or family,

“When I was dating him a lot of my friends hadn't had sex or anything like that, so I had only one friend who had really had sex before, and we weren't super close... If I was seeing someone sic[now], I would talk about it openly because

we all talk about that. Back then, none of my friends talked about it so I didn't want to talk about it. None of them had had sex, so it would be weird if I just talked about my sex life, that's odd. I just didn't talk to people about it, I didn't know anything about it. It's only through talking to people about it that I was like, oh that wasn't right. That wasn't right... I think part of it had to do with the fact that I was so in love with him that I didn't want to believe. The first time ... actually, no that's a lie. I felt uncomfortable with what was happening.”

So did Simran know that this relationship was abusive, or did she not know? This is one place where sex, consent, and relationships get complicated. It is an example of why consent is not always black and white, and why survivors of sexual assault often do not realize that they experienced it until later: consent is grayer than we are led to believe. Sexual assault is not only when someone says no to an activity, and the partner does it anyway. In Simran’s case, it’s when one person says no, and the partner coerces her into saying yes. So, for Simran, because she eventually said yes, over and over again, she knew that something was fishy, but didn’t know that this behavior qualified as assault, coercion, or an abusive partner. This experience and perspective are consistent with all subjects who experienced sexual coercion in unhealthy relationships.

Not only did Simran’s boyfriend coerce her sexually, but also, he coerced her reproductively. Reproductive coercion is “explicit male behaviors to promote pregnancy (unwanted by the woman).” This can include “birth control sabotage” or interfering with a mode of contraception. In Simran’s case, her boyfriend refused to use condoms, even though Simran wanted to use them. This was a consistent trend among abusive partners. Conversations among young men are turning away from condom use.

When Alex explained his definition of consent to us, he said that he does not ask his partner for her consent before intercourse or if he should put on a condom. He assumes that if his partner doesn’t say anything, then she is ok with it. Alex commented

that nobody really uses condoms anymore, an opinion consistent with other subjects that discusses condom use. Although public health research claims this generation uses condoms more frequently than any other, conversations between students say otherwise. The two students who discussed condom use expressed a social turn away from them due to peer pressure. The two women who discussed their abusive partners explained that their partners pressured them out of using condoms, even though it was their initial preference. Because students are moving away from seeing condoms as necessary or cool, self-conscious sexual partners, including abusers, don't want to use them.

### IF THE GENDERS WERE SWITCHED, IT WOULD BE A LOT BIGGER DEAL

When talking about sexual assault in the media or literature, we often label the survivor "her" and the actor "him." This model excludes survivors of sexual assault who are men, people who are assaulted by women, for example, in homosexual relationships, and those who do not identify with a particular gender, and consider themselves gender non-binary, non-conforming, or fluid and prefer they/them pronouns rather than he/his and she/her. In this section, we will discuss survivors of sexual assault who are men and how their gender contributed to their experience. Two of the five men in this study are survivors of sexual assault. Both of them were assaulted or raped by a woman.

Alex, who gave us an example of how students define consent, surprised me in his interview when he brought up his rape, because most subjects that were survivors told me about their experience before the study. While discussing social hierarchy's relationship with sexual assault, I mentioned that not only men assault women in order to assist their social status, but also, women assault men because of his rank. He remarked, "Yeah and that actually happened to me before." I asked him if he could tell me about that experience, and he said,

“Yeah, at [a party] when I was pledging or like rallying whatever. I was pledging and they got me like super fucked up. There was this one girl who I knew from accounting. Talked to her a few times and I blacked out and I blacked in in the [sorority] house at like four in the morning, this was at like 5:00pm. So, I blacked out for like twelve hours. Like four in the morning in the [sorority] house having sex with her...

I mean, I don't even remember talking to her much less seeing her there...And so like, that happened. I don't know if that's a direct result of me being in one of those organizations... I kind of like came to and was like, ‘Okay. I guess this is like, fine.’

... But that's the kind of situation where like, if the genders were switched, it would be a lot bigger deal.”

Alex told me that he knew that the situation was wrong as soon as it happened. In fact, he turned to his partner after sex and told her that he didn't remember anything and that if the genders were switched “it would be really messed up.” He says that she looked “ashamed,” but she knew that he meant it “kind of playfully.” Alex's story shows how normalized sexual assault is at UT Austin. Even telling a partner that you don't remember sex afterwards isn't seen as a big deal.

I sought an understanding of why Alex believed that because the genders are switched, and a man is the victim, the situation is any different. I asked him, “Can you tell me why you think switching the genders makes it messed up?” He told me,

“I mean, it's no more messed up than when I am the victim. It's like the same thing, but like it would be more messed up if it I was the guy and she was the blacked-out girl. I would probably get into a lot of trouble like legally or within the university or something. And it's just like, I think when it's the guy being the perpetrator, it's a lot bigger of a deal in societal or legal standards.”

Since Alex thinks that society and the legal system sees him differently than a female survivor, I asked him if he thinks that if he, hypothetically, reported his assault to the university, if he would be given a different remedy. He thinks so:

“I think I would be taken very less seriously than if a girl did it. Absolutely. I mean like, I wouldn't say they don't believe me. I just think they'd be like, ‘Congrats, you got laid. Get over it.’

I just think that if, like I said, if we switch and the girl [reported], they would be like, ‘Holy shit. Who is this guy? Are you okay?’ You know, rightfully

so. But if I went in like, ‘Yo, some girl had sex with me, and I don't remember it.’ They’d be like, ‘Big fucking deal.’”

I was heartbroken to hear Alex truly believes his assault is not as valid in the eyes of the law, our community, or the university because he is a man. Alex’s feelings are a reflection of a culture that teaches men that they should always want sex. Men are often congratulated for sexual activity in which, if the genders were swapped, society would see as wrong.<sup>20</sup> When discussing the situation with his friends, Alex did not label the encounter as assault and they did not see it as wrong. He says,

“I guess the way I phrased it, I didn't make it sound like I got like sexually assaulted if you can define it as that. I like told people like, oh yeah, I blacked in having sex with some girl in a sorority house. And they were kind of like, ‘Wow. That's crazy.’ And I was just like, ‘Yeah.’

They didn't really, they were like obviously questions and stuff. I answered what I remembered, but it wasn't, no one was like, ‘Dude.’ No one was alarmed.

It was just like fine. I wasn't expecting that kind of reaction necessarily. But it was just like, ‘Wow, how about that?’ You know.”

It sounds like Alex felt at least a little surprised that his friends didn’t find his story concerning. Alex didn’t define the encounter as assault to his friends but tells me that he thinks it’s a “textbook” example of sexual assault.

I was curious to see if Alex expressed feelings of trauma similar to other subjects in the study. In response to most questions, he firmly stated that he did not feel traumatized and did not think about the encounter often. He says,

“I see the girl around and I'll talk to her and like it’s fine. But I'm never like, that's the girl that sexually assaulted me. You know, it’s like, I guess I do think of it like that, but it’s not problematic, or causes me any emotional distress.”

I wonder if Alex really doesn’t feel any trauma, or is he pushing down his emotions because he feels that they are illegitimate? If he believes that what happened to him would not be taken

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<sup>20</sup> Here is an example from Saturday Night Live: [https://youtu.be/m6uvv1aS5\\_I](https://youtu.be/m6uvv1aS5_I)

seriously by the university or law enforcement and is brushed aside by his friends, then his best way of dealing with his assault really is to convince himself that he feels nothing. However, it is important to note that Alex definitively stated that he did not feel traumatized, as did many other survivor subjects.

## I WANTED TO HOOK UP WITH SOMEONE

Ben admits that he raped another student. This feels like an anomaly in a political landscape determined to politicize something as neutral as mitigating sexual assault, as leaders can't help but make camps out of survivors and the 'falsely accused.' Due to the long list of fears preventing a survivor from reporting their assault, only about 2% of rape accusations are false.<sup>21</sup> Accusing survivors of falsely reporting and victim blaming them simply re-traumatizes them and discourages more people from coming forward. Pinning young men who are confused about consent as perpetrators and demonizing them for their mistakes also isn't helpful. All they do is get angry and yell, 'false accusation, 'she just regrets it,' or 'she's retroactively removing her consent,' because they are so afraid of the 'perpetrator' label destroying their reputations. This does not mean that what these men did is okay or that they did not inflict serious lasting trauma. However, we need to recognize that campus sexual assault is often not an act of malice, but is a manifestation of the sexually toxic culture students are raised in.

Ben's honesty allows us to see how cultural pressures can influence a nice kid in an awful way. When I interviewed him, he was visibly nervous, with beads of sweat on his forehead. He stuttered and had trouble formulating clear, concise thoughts for the beginning half of his

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<sup>21</sup> "False Reporting Overview." National Sexual Violence Resource Center. 2012. Accessed May 13, 2019. <https://www.nsvrc.org/publications/false-reporting-overview>.

interview. I waited until he had a long while to warm up before I asked him about the assault.

Here's what he told me:

“Yeah, it was the beginning of sophomore year, I think it was the first party of sophomore year and I was talking to a girl and invited her to-- I lived at the frat house and invited her upstairs to drink. And we went up and, we were both I think very drunk at the time, and then we ended up having sex and then afterwards I realized she probably was too drunk. And I wasn't aware at the time, but.... it, like, I don't know. That's kind of how I saw it happening...

Well I think I wanted-- I wanted to hook up with someone during the party-- And like, because I... hadn't really had sex with anyone, or actually hadn't had sex with anyone since my high school girlfriend, who I, like, was also having sex with during the school year, but, like I wanted to like move on from that. And I think that kind of the whole, like [pledging] and like freshman year made me-- like kind of want to do that...

There was another fraternity member who was like just talking to us at one point and was saying like how living at the house was like great because you just had to take a girl upstairs and she'll want to have sex with you. Like, I was like, ‘Oh, okay.

And so, I like kind of pretty much did that I guess. And like I didn't really... I think I was like young, we were like hooking up and I guess it progressed to there, but I-- and I had never really, we never really talked or like I never got consent, I kind of, I guess assumed that if, you know, if she didn't want to, she would have, you know, said something or done something.

Yeah, but I guess she was, like, more drunk than I expected and, you know, because I don't-- I wasn't talking to her for very long and, I mean, I didn't know what her situation was. I think that was probably a factor, too.”

This is a great example of students assuming that because another student is partaking in the party culture, getting drunk, or going upstairs, then their consent is assumed. Like the women in this thesis who were too intoxicated to lift their heads or remember the sexual encounter, the student that Ben raped likely was too far gone to “say something or do something.”

I asked him about how he defines consent and when he asked for consent during a sexual encounter, and he told me that he asks for consent at every step. I was surprised by this, as he obviously didn't verbally ask for consent that night. He seems to have done a lot of thinking and learning since this event. Ben, unlike many men, raped a woman who is now outspoken about her experience as a rape survivor. In addition, she does not name Ben publicly, allowing Ben to



realize that he did something deeply wrong without being put in the hot seat to defend himself. He thinks that when asked in theory, he would ask for consent every step of the way, but in practice, things just progress without really thinking about it.

I asked him a series of questions at once, hoping to understand how something like this could happen:

“I guess, something I've really been trying to understand about why this happens is it-- is it people not being educated enough about consent? Are they not thinking about the consent education that they've gotten when they're actually in a sexual encounter? Is it people knowing about consent and just like deciding not to ask? Do you have any kind of thoughts about where that falls?”

He replied,

“I think it's, like, partially, like not knowing enough about consent and not, like, taking consent education to heart really...

Like, you really think, like you hear about it and you'll never think [it would be you] ... I personally wouldn't want to have sex with someone who doesn't want to have sex with me, like not even just for them like I just wouldn't want that for myself. I wouldn't, that wouldn't be like a turn on, you know? So it's like, you kind of just assume that just because rape isn't like something you ever think you would do, you like don't really take it into account, you don't really think about it, you're like, ‘Oh, I'm sure whatever I'm doing is fine.’”

Ben's interview allows us to see through the eyes of an assailant and understand what needs to change in order to prevent nights like this from happening again.

## Chapter 5: Aftermath

Now that we know what campus sexual assault actually looks like and why it is happening, we can discuss how student survivors are affected in their social, educational, and romantic lives. Learning about how students experience, or don't experience, trauma enables us to understand the internal conflict students face when determining if their sexual encounter was assault and if they should identify as a survivor. We will see why survivors struggle to tell friends and family about their experience, and how this inhibits them from getting the mental and physical healthcare that they need.

### I HAD A RAPE KIT

If a survivor is lucky, someone will tell them about their option to get a Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE). A SAFE exam collects evidence from the assault, for example, swabbing for DNA inside of the patient's mouth or genitals and taking photos of bruising or abrasions, forming a rape kit of forensic evidence. This healthcare option is time sensitive and should occur within five days after the assault. In addition, showering, changing clothes, brushing your teeth can wash away evidence.

I mention that a sexual assault survivor only has the option to get one of these if they're lucky, because they are almost completely unadvertised. The vast majority of students have no idea what a SAFE exam is or that they can get one for free at University Health Services (UHS). They definitely don't know that it is recommended not to shower or change clothes. Many of them miss their window because they don't tell anyone about their assault until way after their five-day window closed. In addition, students who want to get SAFE exams don't know that it decreases their chances of collecting DNA if they shower or change, so they often end up getting a lower quality SAFE exam than if they knew the instructions.

UT Austin put a specialized SAFE nurse on call in 2015.<sup>22</sup> Earlier this year, student activists were informed that only seven students received SAFE exams at UHS since they became available. Vanessa was ‘lucky’ and had student activists to guide her through her options right after her assault, including the option of whether or not she wanted to get a SAFE exam. She decided that she wanted one.

Vanessa describes the SAFE exam process as difficult and “invasive” as she was at UHS for about six hours waiting for the nurse to arrive, being examined, and receiving emergency contraception and STI prevention medication. However, she is really glad she did it, even though she didn’t end up using the evidence in a trial, because it gave her a sense of power knowing that she could use the evidence if she needed to. When I asked her what about the rape kit was comforting, she says,

“I think that there's very few things that a survivor of sexual assault can actually do. You can get help for yourself or whatever, but I think there's not a lot of action-oriented things you could do, and also there's not a lot of action-oriented things that can stay entirely within your control. And I think getting the kit was something I knew that you didn't have to do anything with, you could get it, and then you could decide to do nothing with it, or you could decide to do something with it.

That gave me basically two years of autonomy over my story and my experience and I was solely in control of what to do about it. I think that was a big sense of comfort because it just made me feel like I had some power over it. Also, even though they try to be very accommodating to people, there really is that tiny window of when you can get the kit, because you can technically, you can technically get it any time, but like if you want to really be an effective kit, it has to be done in those first couple of days.

I think it felt like good that in those couple days I had done what I could do, and I didn't lose that opportunity. I took advantage of all the resources I had. I could walk into that frat (fraternity) and I literally would think to myself like, ‘I could destroy his life. I could ruin his life. Even just telling people in this fraternity that I had a rape kit against someone, could ruin their life.’ That just gave me such power that I ... He didn't know I had, which almost made it even better because he couldn't try to diminish it. It just ... it made yeah, it made me feel like the person in power. So that's what I liked about it.”

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<sup>22</sup> Sarah Marloff, “UT Now Offering Sexual Assault Exams,” *The Austin Chronicle*, November 20, 2015, <https://www.austinchronicle.com/news/2015-11-20/ut-now-offering-sexual-assault-exams/>

For Vanessa, getting a rape kit was an important, empowering experience that she believes defined her relationship with her experience for the next two years. The SAFE exam made it possible for her to uphold a normal social life, because she could return to the fraternity and be in the proximity of her rapist with confidence and power. It is deeply disturbing that the universities aversion to discussing sexual assault and health revokes this opportunity from other survivors, because they don't know that it's an option until it's too late.

### ANYONE COULD BE A PERPETRATOR

Experiencing a sexual assault can affect a student's academic, social, and sexual or romantic life in a myriad of ways. Student survivors gave us personal examples of how their trauma influenced their personal lives. Other student subjects provided startlingly accurate predictions of how trauma would impact students. Vanessa was raped her first night of college and the trauma caused her to struggle for the first year or so of college. Her mental health was seriously affected, and she now uses prescribed anti-depressants and anti-anxiety medication.

Vanessa told me that during her first week of school, the last thing she wanted was to miss class or let her assault affect her schoolwork. Although University Health Services gave her a pass after her SAFE exam, she was determined not to use it:

“I know they gave me like a form where I could get out of class for a couple days if I wanted to. Which is really cool but I'm not about to use it 'cause it was the very beginning of college and I was not about to mess up school the first week of college. I was not about to go ... Basically my mindset for the beginning of it was that I could not let anything crumble or affect my college experience. Which is hard to do when it's your first week of college. But this was the time when I needed to make new friends and I need to go out and meet people. And I needed to go out because this is college and it's not like I'm going to ruin the next four years of my life because of the something happened one day. And I needed to make sure my grades were good, and I needed to make sure that I at least put on a happy face for friends and family because I didn't want anything to be ... Like them suspect anything.”

Students also reported being unable to complete homework or concentrate when dealing with issues related to sexual assault as survivors or activists that support survivors. This public health issue seriously effects academic performance, as those effected become too anxious or depressed to focus on schoolwork. In addition to the educational effects, trauma also impacts students' ability to socialize normally.

Student expressed that they felt like they had something to hide from the friends that they didn't tell about their assault. While they are battling internal trauma, they have to put a smile on their face and pretend like everything is normal in order to avoid publicizing their assault.

Vanessa concisely explains,

“Socially, I'm sure it could completely mess you up. I think it would make it hard to go out, hard to drink. I think that your emotional instability, just like depression, which probably does come out of it for a lot of people, but I think like being sad pushes people away. I think eventually, yes, you can be sad, and people will support you for a little bit, but like you can't be that sad person forever.”

Students' desire to continue their social lives normally causes them to push away or hide their emotions and trauma. This is key to engaging with friends as usual and keeping their secret. Instead of removing themselves from social situations in which they might interact with their perpetrator, they choose to continue life as normal and convince themselves that everything is okay, or deal with their emotions on their own time. It is more important to students to keep their social lives intact than confront their trauma, which may contribute to students' desire to push their survivor identity away.

In addition to their platonic social lives, survivors romantic and sexual lives are influenced by their assault, as many survivors expressed a distrust of sexual partners. Women who were assaulted by men expressed more fearfulness than men who were assaulted by women. Vanessa explains,

“I generally, I just think you lose a lot of trust in other people. Whether it's ... Probably, specifically, the gender that assaulted you, you lose trust in. I really had struggled to see any guy as like good, like actually that will not eventually disappoint me in some way. I still haven't really been proven right, so TBD (to be decided) about that, but I just like, I literally see every guy as eventually going to hurt you in some way. I mean, I haven't like particularly been in a lot of romantic relationships since then, just because I'm busy with other things. I've never really been someone that's like always pursuing a romantic relationship.

I don't really have like a lot of personal experience towards it, but I think it really can build a wall for you and keep you from fully trusting someone. Because, generally, a lot of people's perpetrators are seemingly fine people. They're friends or acquaintances or whatever, so that makes it even worse because you can't detach it by being like, ‘Oh, he was a criminal. That's why he raped me.’ You see it as like anyone could be a perpetrator. I think that that like makes you distrust everyone.”

Because we often perceive rape as a stranger pursuing a violent attack, we are blind to the normalization of sexual assault in student culture. Survivors are tasked with pretending like everything is normal, continuing to party, socialize, and hook up, trying their best to make sure that people don't find out about their assault. This stress bleeds into students education, social experiences, and romantic lives, as their trauma impacts their ability to concentrate on school work, their anxiety and depression pushes them to stay at home instead of going out, and their fear of trusting potential sexual partners can put their romantic and sexual lives on pause.

### IT WASN'T THAT BAD

Students who experienced rape had a broad range of psychological responses. Some survivors describe symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) including flashbacks, nightmares, and panic attacks after their assault. One subject even described being thrown into flashbacks about her rape, which she barely remembers as she was severely intoxicated, while engaging in consensual sexual activity with her current partner.

A group of subjects also reported feeling no trauma or lasting psychological effects. When asked in multiple ways if they experience trauma, the subjects repeatedly stated that they

felt nothing. This finding was particularly interesting because although some subjects did not describe any symptoms of PTSD, stress, or concern, some subjects would tell me that they don't have any lasting psychological effects, while telling me about a stress response.

For example, they would tell me that they have nightmares or flashbacks, but that they're not bad enough to require therapy or mental healthcare. Molly told me that her "blood curdles" when she sees her perpetrator on campus and she has trouble trusting fraternity men, while claiming that her rape had no lasting effects on her.

Hearing survivors of serious physical and psychological trauma tell me that it did not affect them was startling and scary. I believe that this pattern has two parts: first, survivors are displaying an unwillingness to identify as a sexual assault survivor. Students expressed not wanting to label themselves that way or in Molly's case, as she decided whether or not to go to UHS for her possible infection, she describes not wanting to "check that box." "Survivor" is stigmatized, and students expressed concerns that this term would overpower the rest of their identity and destabilize them, rather than empower them.

Second, survivors do not want to take on the responsibility of caring for their mental health, because they feel that it is admitting defeat and succumbing to the pressures that their assailant put on them. It is easier for them to tell themselves that they are okay, that they're not feeling anything abnormal, and that other people who experience rape, especially violent rape, have it a lot worse than they do. A surprising pattern appeared in the data, as subjects claimed that their rape "wasn't that bad," right after describing serious mental health effects. Not seeking healthcare seems to be a means of pushing the experience away.

However, Vanessa was different, as she immediately institutionalized her experience by getting a SAFE exam and started going to the universities Counseling and Mental Health Center

(CMHC). She says that she really didn't like CMHC, because she felt that her therapist was trying to pass her off to another larger group or sometimes was unavailable, because the service is overloaded. In addition, she struggled with the service because she had to pay for the services on her UT account and did not want her parents to find out about the payments, as she had not told them about her rape. I asked her if she sought mental healthcare from a personal therapist after CMHC or told her mom that she was seeking counseling, she said,

“I kind of got depressed for like a bunch of reasons. I was going to start going to a therapist, but then I was so stressed out... I got on medicine from my, just my doctor prescribed it for me. It worked a lot better because I just, I honestly, at the time, I didn't have time to go to therapy. I was so stressed out that I was like, ‘If I had to put in another commitment by going to therapy, I might explode.’ That extra time commitment. The medicine, honestly, worked out better for me.”

None of the subjects, survivors, perpetrators, or student activists receive continuous mental healthcare or therapy, besides Vanessa and her medicine. Students continuously tell themselves that “it’s not that bad” in order to avoid confronting the truth of their trauma.

## YOU CAN GET KICKED OUT OF YOUR MOSQUE

All religions have spectrums of observance and each sect of the religion, sometimes each congregation, has a different set of rules and social norms. Simran, the South Asian activist who told us about sex stigma, also discussed what reporting looks like for survivors of sexual violence in these communities. She describes in an intersectional fashion how not only are there social barriers preventing women from reporting their sexual assault, but also there are extra reasons, layers, and pressures piled on to women who are also Asian. When asking her about the Muslim Honor Code’s perspectives on sexual assault, she says,

“Yeah, it's like if you come forward about rape it violates the Muslim Honor Code and you can get kicked out of your mosque, you can be shunned by the community, all this stuff... if a Muslim woman wants to come forward it has to be a very, very progressive mosque, or she'll lose her entire community but her



husband can still stay in, because her coming forward violates the Muslim Honor Code.”

The fear of losing one’s family and community support often overshadows the survivor’s inclinations to report or come forward. When the stakes are this high, it doesn’t seem worth the risk. Simran describes the criticism she faced from her own family, who she describes as progressive in comparison to many of her peers’ families, when she began to speak out about her assault. Simran tells us about her mom’s reaction when she planned to give a speech that included identifying herself publicly as a sexual assault survivor:

“Even my own mom, who's been so supportive, when I sent her my script, what I was going to say, she didn't want me to say I was assaulted. We had a full out 12-hour argument about it. She's like, people are going to see this, you're attaching your name to this. What happens if people are looking you up in the future? So even I think the most well-meaning parents do it. If a student wants to not listen to their parents and report, they still have the option to do that. But I think that you get so much support from your parents, I don't think I would ever be able to go through the whole process without my parents. And so, I think [it's] hard for [survivors] to come forward in general because they've been raised where is such a taboo thing, sex in general is not very openly talked about, and then admitting you had [sex]. Then, after admitting you had [sex], coming forward [as a survivor], personally is a lot of pressure. Then you add familial pressure, cultural pressure, all that stuff.”

Simran is comfortable discussing her experience now, but it took her years to get there. Pressure from her community and family weighed on her. Instead of receiving encouragement to tell her story, she was told that it would influence her personal life in a negative way, and she should not reveal her experience. Her parents are well-meaning and want the best for her. They in no way meant to shame their daughter, but their fears of what would happen to Simran if she publicly identified as a survivor discouraged her from owning her story and created a rift between a well-meaning mother and a daughter seeking to turn a traumatizing experience into a source of freedom and empowerment. For a woman of South Asian descent, there are decision-making factors piled onto the already stressful choice of whether or not to report your assault.

## TO REPORT OR NOT TO REPORT

Resources for students involved in a sexual assault include the Title IX Office, Counseling and Mental Health Center (CMHC), UT Police Department (UTPD), Interpersonal Violence Peer Support (IVPS), and Not On My Campus (NOMC). In my time as an activist with Not On My Campus, several students came to me with their stories in order to simply get it off their chest or seek counseling to learn about their reporting options. Out of all of these students, not one of them ever reported to the university Title IX office or the police. This imbalance inspired this thesis, because I wanted to understand why so many students were coming to my friends and I in Not On My Campus, putting the weight of a counselor, therapist, and social worker on our student shoulders, rather than reporting to the university and talking with a professional Title IX office or UHS nurse. What is the x factor that keeps survivors from crossing the bridge from fellow student to university? Why are only 6% of students that are assaulted reporting to UT Austin?

Students of all backgrounds gave laundry lists of reasons why a person would not want to report they assault. They included a distrust of the reporting system and the university's ability to help them, an unfamiliarity with their options, fearfulness that their case could snowball out of their control, worries that their report would get out and ostracize them socially, belief that if the perpetrator was part of a prominent organization, like a fraternity, then the organization's power would squash their reporting efforts and the assailant would not be held accountable. Students explicitly stated that they did not want to be labeled as a "victim" or "survivor" and that desire kept them from reporting. In many cases, survivors expressed empathy for their assailant, who is usually their friend, because they know that reporting them would tarnish their reputation and they don't want to ruin their lives. Campus sexual assault is dangerously normalized and

commonplace, so much so, that students see no reason to report, because they don't think that it will make a dent.

Simran, who had an abusive boyfriend who coerced her into sex and refused to use condoms, believes that reporting him to Title IX is worthless, because he wouldn't learning anything. The risk of a report uprooting her own mental sanity isn't worth it to her:

“Yeah, so I actually [thought about reporting] multiple times. The first time, I was obviously like I'm in love with him, I don't want to do anything, so whatever. Then I actually considered doing it again earlier this semester, and I didn't do it because I was like, he's not going to learn anything from it, and then I'm just going to be coined this psycho bitch who's trying to ruin his life and hasn't moved on. I wouldn't even mind being coined that if you understood what happened and that it wasn't okay, and that [this] isn't how he should be treating other people. But he wasn't going to, so I decided I didn't want to deal with the emotional stress of having to re go through a Title IX thing if what I wanted, which was him to learn about his actions, wasn't going to happen.”

So, I decided that for my mental sanity I didn't want to have to go through all that again if nothing was going to come out of it, if that makes sense.”

For every subject, and every student that I know, the risks of what could go wrong heavily outweigh the possibility of the assailant learning their lesson or being held accountable. Distrust of the system, fears of repercussions, and an aversion to self-identifying as a sexual assault survivor are only a few of the many reasons that students don't report.

# Conclusions and Recommendations

Everyone can play their part to prevent campus sexual assault. In order to change the way that our communities approach sex and consent, we need a grassroots reformation of consent culture from within student to student conversations, public health organizations, and teachers. In addition, policymakers, administrators, and community leaders can use a top down approach to encourage local and educational organizations to engage in quality consent education.

We need to change the way that consent education is approached. It doesn't need to be all about sex in a way that ostracizes communities that are religious or believe in abstinence. In fact, this education should be given to students as young as middle-school age, when a non-sexual conversation is most appropriate. We can teach students about personal boundaries and healthy relationships in order to give them the tools they need to have conversations with potential partners. As students get older, consent education can and should be combined with education regarding alcohol and drug use and human development or puberty.

However, it is crucial that lawmakers have a thorough and explicit understanding of the sexual assault epidemic in order to understand what is happening on college campuses and what kinds of policies are the proper solutions.

1. Change the method for which we study campus sexual assault and prescribe remedies.
  - a. Include students in the question formation, evidence and data collection, analysis and writing of studies to understand and mitigate campus sexual assault. Students unwillingness to honestly communicate with adults and administrators is made clear through the 6% reporting rate and students' long list of reasons why they don't report their assault. The way that current professors navigated sex and relationships in their college years, versus the way that students interact now, is a

day and night difference. We need to come together to understand this new playing field and form effective research questions and policy ideas together.

- b. The survivor/perpetrator framework does not encapsulate the student experience and is politically inflammatory. We should adopt language that is less accusatory and recognizes the humanity of the student perpetrators. This recommendation in no way intends to normalize rape or sexual assault, but merely means to recognize that the majority of these students are committing sexual assault unknowingly, non-violently, and due to ignorance and lack of education, or because they have become victim to a culture that puts an immense social pressure on them to have sex. This student culture encourages drunken sex between partners with little to no relationship, greatly increasing the risk of assault. When we label students as perpetrators, we are pushing them away from learning about consent, because this label is demonizing and has the potential to ruin their reputations. Using descriptions such as, “have you ever had an experience in which you weren’t sure that you had your partner’s full, conscious consent?” when interviewing subjects led to more honest data. We need to be bringing these students into learning conversations in order to heal, rather than divide.
2. Reform university consent education. Every university should have in-person, peer-led, mandatory training for all students. It is unacceptable that the University of Texas at Austin, and universities nationwide, get away with a one-time, online consent module while 15% of women are being raped on their campuses.
- a. Every person on every level can help. Although universities should be responsible for educating their students, there are public relations challenges that inhibit

administrators from acting in order to avoid being labeled the ‘rape school.’

Parents can educate their own children about consent. They can build consent education programs for their children’s middle and high schools or lobby administrators or local officials to implement consent education programs. Middle and high school students can form these programs at their own schools with the help of parents, teachers, social workers, or healthcare providers. While college administrators sit idly, students can develop their own peer education programs like Not On My Campus and educate large student organizations in order to redefine consent culture. Local, state, and national policymakers can make consent education mandatory at schools on every level. They can increase funding for University Title IX Offices in order to allow them to educate students. Passing legislation for comprehensive sexual education, healthy relationships training, and consent education in public schools is ideal.

3. Increase student awareness of reporting and response systems.
  - a. University administrators should actually tell students about the Title IX Office and university reporting systems. Every single subject that was not a student activist had no clue how to report a sexual assault. Students are afraid of institutionalization already, and don’t trust the university to handle their sexual trauma with care. When students have little to no knowledge of what this reporting system looks like or how to navigate it, this issue is compounded. A complete overhaul of how the university reporting system is communicated to students is key to increasing reporting rates, holding students accountable for their

actions, and breaking the cycle of sexual assault, rape, and abuse at the University of Texas at Austin and American universities.

- b. SAFE exam awareness is crucial to making this healthcare option accessible to survivors of rape and sexual assault. The time window is small, and the instructions are specific, so students need to be well-versed on this option before sexual assault occurs, so they know the rules as they navigate their time-sensitive decisions.
4. A reporting system that can allow students to remain anonymous in order to get the care that they need. Students number one reason for not reporting is the social repercussions. They do not want to be labeled the kid that got raped. They do not want to be socially ostracized for destroying the reputation and life of their assailant.
  - a. Increase state and federal funding for Title IX offices to enable them to deal with their high influx of cases in a quality, timely manner. Increasing the quality of the system could encourage students to use it.
5. Remove any and all questions about sexual assault from University Health Services (UHS) Women's Clinic general questionnaire. This question deters women experiencing physical sexual trauma from seeking the healthcare that they need, immediately. In Molly's case, the presence of a checkbox asking her if she was assaulted, before she could even define the assault for herself, put her at serious risk for a vaginal infection from a "green and moldy" tampon stuck in her vagina for days. It is unfair that Molly was excluded from receiving care because rape caused her injury. This question is unacceptable and makes healthcare inaccessible to students. If students are coming to UHS for a SAFE Exam, then this should be a separate questionnaire.

6. When forming systems of reporting and justice for survivors, and consent education for students, we must consult people in communities of color in order to gain a better understanding of how the system can serve them. When Simran told us that South Asian students were wary to engage with Not On My Campus because all of the students were white, we are seeing an entire community excluded from consent education because they do not feel that their experience is represented.
  - a. It is important to note that it seems all communities, regardless of identity, presented the same problems with consent and communication, but various student subcultures have other issues layered on top of that commonality. For example, only two of the 14 subjects identified as LGBTQ. These subjects' opinions were consistent with the heterosexual and cis-gendered subjects *and* they hypothesized ways in which that community could influence the culture of campus sexual assault in different, additional ways. In addition, the study's students of color shared perspectives similar to white students *and* explained ways in which their identity added on to their experience. This is why we must use an intersectional lens when exploring this issue further.



# Appendix

## APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW SCRIPT

### Student Perspectives on Campus Sexual Assault: A Participant Observation Study

This project aims to characterize the culture of campus sexual assault from the student perspective. It will help create an awareness of this troubling aspect of UT's culture.

I would like to record these interviews to ease the transcription process. The interview will be audio taped, no personally identifying information will be visible on them, they will be kept in a secure, locked room, and the recordings will be heard or viewed only for research purposes by me and UT research staff. Within a week of doing this interview I am going to have it transcribed, anonymize it, and destroy the recording. If you feel that this sufficiently protects your anonymity, please proceed, and if you do not think that it sufficiently protects your anonymity, please decline. I am promising anonymity and I intend to keep that promise under any and all circumstances. I promise to destroy any evidence that could lead the study back to a subject. As a researcher, I have to promise anonymity at all costs to all people who respond to me, even if in held of court of law.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. This interview is expected to last approximately one to two hours. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the study, you can contact the Office of Research Support and Compliance at (512)232-1543 or me at [my cell phone number].

We will be discussing personal information and experiences. It is possible that you may have feelings of anxiety or re-traumatization as a result of these conversations. Some of the questions maybe of a personal or sensitive nature, for example, discussing instances of sexual assault. You may skip a question if you do not wish to answer it. You may answer using a hypothetical, like "My friend did x and felt y about it." If the interview generates a report that you plan to harm yourself or others, I will stop the recording, stop the interview, strongly encourage you to use the resources listed below, and may be ethically required to report that information to the local police department. If any point you would like me to stop recording, that option is open to you. If at any point you would like to pause the interview or discontinue answering questions, that option is open to you. By answering these questions, you are giving you full verbal informed consent to participate in this study. The data you share may also be used in future studies or publications.

Here is a list of resources that you can use if this interview stirs feelings of anxiety or trauma. You may keep this list:

#### Confidential Resources on Campus:

- Counseling and Mental Health Center – VAV Advocacy Appointments
- IVPS – Interpersonal Violence Peer Support
  - A program created last year that gives students like us over 50 hours of response training
  - You can go talk to these highly trained peers if you'd prefer to talk to a student rather than an adult

- They have walk-in appointments
- CMHC Crisis Line - 512-471-CALL (2255)
- Interpersonal Violence Peer Support (IVPS) – New! Make appointments online at [http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/ivps\\_appointment.php](http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/ivps_appointment.php) or call (512) 471-6147
- University Health Services
- Free Sexual Assault Forensic Exam (SAFE)
- Must occur within 5 days (if police are involved) and 4 days if police are not involved
- UHS business hours, Monday-Friday 8:00am-5:30pm and Saturday 11:00am-3:00pm (during long semesters).
- Advocates Make an appointment online at [http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/advocate\\_appointment.php](http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/emergency/advocate_appointment.php) or call (512) 471-5017

#### Other Resources on Campus:

- Voices Against Violence - <https://cmhc.utexas.edu/vav/index.html>
- BeVocal – <https://www.wellnessnetwork.utexas.edu/BeVocal/>
- Behavior Concerns Advice Line - (512) 232-5050, operates 24/7
- SURE Walk - [orderasurewalk@gmail.com](mailto:orderasurewalk@gmail.com), (512) 232-9255
- Title IX Office - <https://titleix.utexas.edu/file-a-report/>
- UTPD – (512) 471-4441
- UT Domestic Violence Clinic - (512) 232-1358

Let's begin:

#### Demographic Information

1. For how many years have you attended UT-Austin?
2. How old are you?
3. What is your ethnicity?
4. What is your religious identity?
5. What is your sexual orientation? Or, what is your gender preference of sexual partner?  
straight
6. What is your gender identity? Or, what personal pronouns do you prefer to use? For example, he/she/they.

#### Student Perception of the Issue

1. Do you think that campus sexual assault is an issue in the U.S. and why?
2. Do you think that campus sexual assault is an issue at UT-Austin and why?

#### Campus Culture

1. In what ways do you think UT culture influences the expression of this issue?
2. Let's look at certain student groups. Do any that have a particular influence on campus sexual assault culture that come to mind?
3. Do you think certain student subcultures particularly influence the expression of this issue and how?
  - a. How do you think that Athletics influences campus sexual assault?
  - b. How do you think that Greek life influences campus sexual assault?

- i. Do you think perpetrators in Athletics and Greek life are held accountable?
    1. What do you think their repercussions are?
- c. How do you think that students for whom religion is important influence campus sexual assault?
- d. How do you think that student activists influence campus sexual assault?
4. What aspects of UT cultural life do you think might influence the way that sexuality is practiced?
  - a. How do you think heterosexual culture influences sexual assault?
  - b. How do you think non-heterosexual culture influences sexual assault?
5. What do you think would drive a student to perpetrate sexual assault?
  - a. What aspects of campus culture do you think influenced him or her to perpetrate sexual assault?
6. Do you think that a system of social hierarchy influences a culture of campus sexual assault?
7. Is there any other of campus culture that we haven't discussed that you think is relevant?

### Bystander Intervention

Let's talk about what it's like to be a student bystander:

1. Do you ever see behavior on or around campus that concerns you?
2. Do you ever see behavior between students that concerns you?
3. What kind of student behavior strikes you as concerning?  
violent, aggressive, too drunk
4. When see concerning behavior, what is your response usually?
5. Do you ever see sexually aggressive behavior occur between students?
  - a. What does that look like?
  - b. What is your response?
6. What do you think would keep you from intervening if you saw a student who drank too much?
7. What do you think would encourage you to intervene if you saw a student who drank too much?
8. What do you think would keep you from intervening if you heard someone using sexually violent language?
9. What do you think would encourage you to intervene if you heard someone using sexually violent language?
10. What do you think would keep you from intervening if you saw threatening behavior?
11. What do you think would encourage you to intervene if you saw threatening behavior?
12. Let's play a scenario:
  - a. You're at a party at the beginning of school. You know a number of the freshman students there and feel a responsibility to ensure their safety and make sure they have fun. The majority of the people at the party are drinking alcohol. You see a young student and an older student drinking and flirting. You know that the younger student had a lot to drink. Do you intervene?
    - i. If yes, how?
    - ii. If no, why not?
  - b. You later lose track of this younger student. Do you try to find him/her?

- i. If yes, how?
  - ii. If no, why not?
- c. You are soon informed that the older student took the intoxicated younger student upstairs and assaulted him/her. What are your next steps?

### Consent

Let's talk about how students discuss and define consent:

1. Do you and your friends ever talk about consent?
  - a. In what ways?
  - b. What prompts these types of conversations?
2. How do you define consent?
  - a. Do you think that consent needs to be verbal?
  - b. Mutual?
  - c. Enthusiastic?
  - d. A yes?
  - e. Can it be removed at any time?
3. Is it possible for it to be removed at any time?
4. How do you think you came to this definition of consent?
5. Have you ever received any consent education?
  - a. What was ineffective about this form of education?
6. What signals, cues, or language do you think is necessary to know that you have someone's consent in a sexual encounter?
7. At what steps in a sexual encounter do you usually ask for consent?
  - a. Do you ask for consent before you touch someone?
  - b. Before you kiss someone?
  - c. Before you remove an article of clothing?
  - d. Before you touch areas of your partner's body generally considered private?
  - e. Before you engage in oral sex?
  - f. Before you engage in intercourse?
8. How do you ask for consent?
9. Do you ever try to take an encounter further without asking and wait to see how your partner reacts?
  - a. If your partner is silent, do you interpret that as consent?
10. Let's say your partner agrees to have sex with you with a condom, do you need to ask for their consent to remove it?
11. Do you think silence is a yes?

### Consent, Alcohol and Other Mind-Altering Drugs

We all know that students party, use drugs and alcohol, and have sex while using these substances. Let's talk about consent when alcohol and drugs are involved:

1. Do you ever use alcohol or drugs?
2. Do you ever pursue sexual encounters while using these substances?
3. Do you think that you can give consent while using these substances?
  - a. Is there a point at which you think you can no longer consent?
  - b. Can you describe where that line is?
  - c. How do you know you've reached the point that you can no longer consent?

4. Do you think that your partner can give consent while using these substances?
  - a. Is there a point at which you think he/she can no longer consent?
  - b. Can you describe where that line is?
  - c. How do you know you've reached the point that he/she can no longer consent?

### Supporting Students

There can be many different listener responses for those who hear about sexual assault:

1. When you listen to information or stories about sexual assault, how do you feel?
  - a. What is your response?
  - b. What are the responses of those around you?
2. What do you know about supporting survivors of sexual assault?
3. Have you ever learned about how to respond to a survivor?
4. Would you feel comfortable if someone came to you after an assault?
5. If a friend were to come to you and tell you that they were assaulted, how would you respond?
6. If a friend were to come to you and tell you that they assaulted someone else, how would you respond?
7. What do you think influences you to respond in that way?
8. If you supported a survivor, how do you think it would make you feel?
9. Would you seek care for yourself after supporting a survivor?
  - a. What kind of care?
10. How do you think that supporting someone who experienced assault would impact the supporter's social experiences?
11. How do you think that supporting someone who experienced assault would impact the supporter's educational experiences?

### Student Conversations

Let's talk about the way that you and your friends talk about sex on campus:

1. Do you ever hear your friends talk about sex?

### **Details of How Sex Is Described on Campus**

2. How do they talk to each other about sexual encounters?
3. Do they brag about sex?
4. Do they brag about having sexual interactions with people in particular social groups?
5. Do you feel campus culture exerts pressure to be sexually active?
6. Do your friends express concerns about sex?
7. Do your friends talk about sex in a way that shows concern or distress?

### **Language Used**

Let's talk about what kind of language students use to talk about sex:

1. Do they talk about particular groups of people in sexual ways?
  2. Do they talk about particular groups of people in derogatory terms?
  3. Do they talk about particular groups of people in violent terms?
  4. Do you ever hear your friends make jokes about sexual violence?
    - a. Do they ever say things like, "like 'no means yes and yes means anal'"?
- If yes,
- b. What are the responses of listeners around you?
  - c. What is your response?

5. Do you ever hear your friends discuss sexual assault?
  - a. In what way?
  - b. Do think that students use phrases like “she was asking for it?” or “she just regrets hooking up with him”?
  - c. Do you think your friends typically believe those who accuse others of sexual assault?
  - d. Do you think the general student body typically believes those who accuse others of sexual assault?
  - e. What are the responses of listeners around you?
  - f. What is your response?

### **Impact of That Language**

6. Do students talk about sexual violence?
  - a. How do they talk about sexual violence?
    - i. What are the responses of listeners around you?
    - ii. What is your response?
  - b. Do students make light of it or joke about it?
    - i. What are the responses of listeners around you?
    - ii. What is your response?
  - c. Do students talk about it metaphorically, like “that test raped me?”
    - i. What are the responses of listeners around you?
    - ii. What is your response?

### **Conversations with Potential Partners**

Let’s talk about how we talk to people we find attractive:

1. Would you say that you flirt with a potential partner verbally?
2. How would you describe flirting?
  - a. Is it complementary?
    - i. Of a personality trait?
    - ii. Of a body part?
  - b. Can you give me an example of a comment you would make to someone if you were flirting with them?
3. Have you ever made flirtatious or sexual comments to someone that may have made them uncomfortable?
  - a. What did you say?
  - b. What was your intention when making that comment?
  - c. What makes you think that you made the other person uncomfortable?
  - d. Why do you think it made them uncomfortable?

### Student Experiences: Survivors

Let’s talk about students who experience sexual assault:

1. How many students on campus do you think are survivors of sexual assault?
  - a. How many women?
  - b. How many men?
  - c. Do you think these rates differ based on sexuality?
  - d. Based on ethnicity?
  - e. Based on gender identity?

### **Impact on Life**

1. In what ways do you think experiencing sexual assault impacts someone's life in general?
2. How do you think that experiencing assault impacts someone's social experiences?
3. How do you think that experiencing assault impacts someone's educational experiences?
4. Do you think that the survivor experiences trauma?
  - a. How does that trauma impact their future social experiences?
  - b. Their educational experience?
  - c. Their future romantic experiences?
5. Do you think that the perpetrator experiences trauma?
  - a. How does that trauma impact their future social experiences?
  - b. Their educational experience?
  - c. Their future romantic experiences?

### **Knowing Survivors**

6. Do you know a student personally who is a survivor of sexual assault?
7. How many?
  - a. If multiple, pick one first and we'll repeat this set of questions for as many survivors as you feel comfortable talking about

If yes:

- b. When did they tell you about their experience?
- c. How did they tell you about their experience?
- d. What do you think encouraged them to tell you about their experience?
- e. Did they tell anyone else about their experience?
- f. Can you tell me about the experience that they disclosed to you?
  - i. Did they know their perpetrator before the assault?
    1. In what capacity?
  - ii. Did they see or engage with their perpetrator after the assault?
    1. Why?
  - iii. Do they still see or engage with their perpetrator?
    1. Why?
- g. Did they realize that they were being assaulted during the encounter or immediately after?
  - i. If no, how did they realize that they were a survivor?
- h. Did this survivor seek support from any university resources?
- i. Did this survivor seek support from any off-campus resources?
  - i. Did they seek counseling?
  - ii. Did they report to the police?
- j. If they did not report to the university:
  - i. Why do you think that they made that decision?
- k. If they did not report to the police:
  - i. Why do you think that they made that decision?
- l. If they did report to university or police?
  - i. Can you tell me more about their experience with those entities?
- m. How do you think this survivor thinks about their experience now?
- n. Do they engage in any activities related to sexual assault prevention or advocacy now?
- o. How do you think being a survivor impacts their social experiences?
- p. How do you think being a survivor impacts their educational experiences?

- q. How do you think being a survivor impacts their future sexual or romantic experiences?

(If multiple survivors known, repeat Question 6.)

### **Survivor Experiences**

1. Have you ever experienced sexual harassment or assault?
2. Is there or not more to elaborate on that experience?
  - a. If yes,
    - i. Can you elaborate on that experience?
    - ii. Did you ever tell anyone about the encounter before this interview?
      1. If yes, what do you think encouraged you to tell others your experience?
    - iii. Did you know your perpetrator before the assault?
      - a. In what capacity?
    2. Did you see or engage with the perpetrator after the assault?
      - a. Why?
    3. Do you still see or engage with the perpetrator?
      - a. Why?
  - iv. Did you realize that you were being assaulted during the encounter or immediately after?
    1. If no, how did you realize that you were a survivor?
  - v. Did you seek support from any university resources?
  - vi. Did you seek support from any off-campus resources?
    1. Did you seek counseling?
    2. Did you report to the police?
  - vii. Did you receive Sexual Assault Forensic Exam or a rape kit?
    1. If yes, what lead you to that decision?
    2. If no, what lead you to that decision?
  - viii. Did you report to the police or university?
    1. What lead you to that decision?
    2. If yes,
      - a. Can you tell me more about your experience with those entities?
  - ix. Have your feelings about your experience changed over time?
  - x. Do you engage in any activities related to sexual assault prevention or advocacy now?

### **Student Experiences: Lack of consent**

1. Have you ever had a sexual experience in which you we're sure that you had your partners consent for every activity?

If yes,

  - a. Can you tell me a little bit more about that experience?
  - b. Did you ever tell anyone about the encounter before this interview?
    - i. If yes, what do you think encouraged you to tell others your experience?
  - c. Did you know the other party beforehand?
    1. In what capacity?
  - ii. Did you see or engage with the other party after the encounter?



1. Why?
- iii. Do you still see or engage with them?
  1. Why?
- d. Did you realize that consent was not present during the encounter or immediately after?
  - i. If no, how did you realize that the encounter may not have been consensual?
- e. Did you seek support from any university resources?
- f. Did you seek support from any off-campus resources?
  - i. Did you seek counseling, and why?
  - ii. Did you report to the police, and why?
- g. How do you think about this experience now?
- h. How has the way you think about the experience changed over time?
- i. Do you engage in any activities related to sexual assault prevention or advocacy now?

#### Sexual Preference

1. Do you think that gender preference of sexual partner is widely discussed on campus?
2. Do you or your friends discuss gender preference of sexual partner?
  - a. In what way?
3. Do you think that gender preference of sexual partner influences the culture of sexual assault?
  - a. In what way?
4. Do you think that those who are non-heterosexual have a different perspective on sexual assault?
  - a. Are they at a higher risk of assault?

#### Gender Identity

1. Do you think that gender identity is widely discussed on campus?
2. Do you or your friends discuss gender identity?
  - a. In what way?
3. Do you think that gender identity influences the culture of sexual assault?
  - a. In what way?
4. Do you think that those who are not cis-gender have a different perspective on campus sexual assault?
  - a. Are they at a higher risk of assault?

#### Punishment and Justice

Let's talk about what happens after a sexual assault. Specifically, what the justice system looks like in these cases:

1. Can you tell me what you know about the university reporting system for sexual assault cases?
2. Have you ever interacted with this system as a witness, plaintiff, or respondent?
3. What do you think are important qualities for reporting systems to have to encourage survivors to come forward?

4. What do you think would be a good means of determining punishment or rehabilitation for perpetrators?
5. How do you think perpetrators should be punished and/or rehabilitated?

### Reporting

1. Do you think students usually come forward about their experiences with sexual assault?
2. What do you think influences them to come forward?
3. What do you think influences them not to come forward?
4. In what ways do you think a survivor would be socially affected by coming forward?
  - a. By not coming forward?
5. What is the effect of being involved in a sexual assault on a person's social life?
6. Do you think that a student would be more likely to report or not report based on any social criteria?
7. Do you think that survivors utilize university resources to seek support?
  - a. If yes, which ones?
  - b. If no, why not?

Thank you for participating in this interview. Discussing sensitive content has the potential to re-traumatize those who have experienced sexual violence or work with survivors. The Counseling and Mental Health Center has free appointments to help with students deal with trauma. Their number is (512) 471-3515.

## APPENDIX B: DATA ANALYSIS CODING GUIDE

- Great quotes
- student perception
- abusive relationships
  - feelings
  - partner behavior
  - reproductive coercion
  - sexual coercion
- accused experiences
  - emotional changes
  - feelings
  - friends who are accused
  - if consent was asked for
  - reputation
  - substance use
  - survivor status
  - telling others
  - trauma
- aftermath
  - contact with perpetrator
  - decision to report
  - effect on life
  - educational
  - romantic and sexual

- social
- feelings over time
- healthcare
- no trauma
- SAFE exams
- sexual hyperactivity
- slut shaming
- stigma & judgement
- telling others
- trauma and mental health
- consent
  - consent and substances
  - consent education
  - contraception
  - in relationships
  - meaningful consent
  - power
  - removal of consent
  - verbal consent
  - when to ask
- conversations amongst friends
  - campus sexual assault
  - consent
  - jokes about sexual violence
  - sexual pressure & bragging
  - sexual violence
  - victim blaming
- party culture
  - drinking
  - drugs
  - hookups
  - OU
  - owing something
  - parties
  - post liberation vs 60's
  - qb sneak
  - social hierarchy
- reporting & justice
  - accountability
  - changes
  - doesn't know
  - due process
  - empathy for the accused
  - false accusations
  - fear
  - invalidation

- prevention
- reasons not to report
- reasons to report
- reporting perception
- Title IX
- student cultures
  - athletics
  - greek life
  - LGBTQ students
  - religious students
  - ROTC
  - spirit groups
  - students of color
- survivor experiences
  - contraception
  - feelings
  - male survivorship
  - relationship with perpetrator
  - substance use at assault
  - survivor experience
- third parties
  - bystander intervention
  - listener responses
  - mental health and trauma
  - stress or pressure
  - supporting others/friends
- Traits
  - accused
  - advocate
  - Age
  - ethnicity
  - gender identity
  - religion
  - sexuality
  - survivor
  - years at school
- university
  - education bad
  - education good
  - fault
  - no fault
  - student activists
  - survivor treatment

# Biography

Sophie Jerwick is a born and raised Kansas kid and a second-generation Longhorn. Both of her parents attended the University of Texas at Austin and she is grateful that she could follow their path thanks to the Dedman Distinguished Scholarship and the Dedman Family. Sophie enrolled in the Plan II Honors program in 2015 and was a pre-medical student. She graduated Phi Beta Kappa in 2019 and was a Marshall Scholar Finalist. She plans to apply to medical school in summer 2019. She is interested in the intersection of health, gender, and policy.

Sophie was a student activist for campus sexual assault prevention, education, and advocacy with Not On My Campus, a student-led organization. She served as the Director of Outreach and Director of Peer Education, catalyzing healthy conversations about sex and consent with students. Sophie interned with Senator Wendy Davis's non-profit Deeds Not Words for two semesters and founded the UT Deeds chapter, empowering young people to be activists for gender equity issues. She used her experiences as a student, advocate, and researcher to testify at the Texas Capitol for women's healthcare legislation and organized students to do so as well.

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